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THE PHANTOM COMICS AND THE NEW LEFT

A Socialist Superhero

Robert Aman

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Preface

To this day, just to the right of the brown and orange striped couch, there is still a white door leading to the garret on Trädgårdsvägen in Vadstena, a quaint town in southern Sweden. It was behind this pale door in my grandparents' house that I, like the Pevensie siblings entering the wardrobe gateway to Narnia, made my first discoveries of the world of comics. My uncles had since long moved out and left behind what was, in my eyes, an invaluable treasure in the form of comic books and albums, reflecting the dominant tastes of children growing up during the seventies and eighties in Sweden. Behind the door to the dimly lit garret, where an adult could not stand upright—which, in my mind, confirmed the feeling of entering a zone intended for children—Tintin, Blueberry and Corto Maltese awaited with their many thrilling adventures. However, the finest prize was something entirely different: bundles of *The Phantom* comic books. The fact that these comics were printed in black and white (like many readers of my own generation or older, the decision to start printing the Swedish *The Phantom* comic in color is 1991 is still considered questionable) only added layers of mystique to the adventures and the exotic environments around the world where various members of the Phantom dynasty have righted wrongs throughout history. There was something about the character that spoke to my young sensibility in a way that other members of the same guild—Spider-Man, Superman, or Batman—were unable to. Both DC Comics' and Marvel's stables of heroes were visually

thrilling, with pages in color that added a sense of luxury, but the stories never captured my imagination in quite the same way as the Phantom did.

His lack of superpowers may have played a part in this, making him come across as more human and relatable, but there was something else in his essence that made me, like so many others who grew up in Sweden during the 1970s, and 1980s, wholeheartedly embrace the adventures of the Ghost Who Walks. As well as being relatable, the Phantom was comprehensive and recognizable in his way of reasoning, and in his ethical and moral stance between right and wrong which made him somewhat unique. In many ways, he came across as a living history text book where he, the twenty-first generation, or any of his ancestors always seemed to have a certain knack for getting caught up in conflicts familiar from history class, newspaper articles, or just outside our windows. And like us school children, his favorite drink was milk.

In a newspaper article to commemorate the Phantom's 65th year in the Swedish domain, journalist Pär Wirtén defines the American-made crime fighter as a "Swedish superhero," noting that there is no other place in the world where the Phantom is as loved as in Sweden. In an attempt to pinpoint the actual reasons for this, Wirtén identifies something familiar about the Phantom as if he lives in our political reflexes, mirroring the public landscape around us.[1] This is a book about these political reflexes, which seeks to answer the question of how an American superhero series about the descendent of an English aristocrat living in the African jungle started to reflect values that made him familiar to people in a Nordic country that is often far from the scene of the masked hero's many adventures, becoming a commercial success unrivalled by any other superhero in this part of the world in the process. This is done by considering the relationship between comic book fantasy and radical politics in modern Sweden from 1968 and throughout the seventies. During this period, *The Phantom* not only became Swedish in terms of political ideals but also emerged as the most socially conscious superhero comic.

In order to write this book, I am indebted to Ulf Granberg, iconic editor-in-chief of the Swedish *The Phantom* comic book, and Magnus Knutsson, writer of many of the most renowned adventures produced out of Stockholm, who both kindly invited me to their homes and generously shared their lives and times with the Phantom. While only a handful of their statements are included in the book, their insights have been invaluable in order to carry the project forward. Andreas Eriksson's encyclopedic knowledge of anything and everything in the Phantom universe

has been an invaluable source of information. I am also grateful to Mikael Sol, current editor-in-chief of *The Phantom*, for granting permission to republish panels from the comics discussed in the book.

The Phantom Comics and the New Left: A Socialist Superhero is the end product of a project that I embarked on as part of my previous employment at the University of Glasgow's School of Education, continuing through my current position at the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Learning at Linköping University. I want to express my appreciation to Michele Schweisfurth and Andreas Fejes for their continuous support. I also want to thank Roger Sabin, editor of this series, for his interest in the project and his generous encouragement in transforming it into a book. Finally, Mirja Kalms, a constant source of inspiration, has graciously refrained from complaining too loudly every time another large box of comics marked "research material" moves into our apartment.

* * *

Portions of this book have been published elsewhere. Chapter 2 is a revised version of the article "When The Phantom Became an Anticolonialist: Socialist Ideology, Swedish Exceptionalism, and the Embodiment of Foreign Policy" in *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, and Chapter 3 is a revised version of "The Phantom fights Apartheid: New Left Ideology, Solidarity Movements and the Politics of Race" in *Inks: Journal of the Comics Studies Society*. For permission to republish, I thank the editors, journals and presses.

Linköping, Sweden Robert Aman

Note

1. *Sydsvenskan*, June 25, 2015.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract This chapter introduces the Phantom, his backstory, and publication history in different parts of the world. The chapter continues by introducing the main argument of the book that the Phantom, a product of American mass culture, was refashioned to meet the interests and demands of a Swedish audience. Some of the most active contributors to the series in recent decades have been the Sweden-based creators known as Team Fantomen. Team Fantomen became an international publication node in *The Phantom* franchise in 1972 when they set up their official production of licensed scripts which enabled them to redefine the character, accused of both racism and sexism, in line with the progressive Left-wing politics which dominated Swedish politics and public discourse throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Keywords The Phantom · New Left · Lee Falk · Superhero comics · Ideology · Socialism

On Wednesday August 27, 1986, a larger crowd than usual had paid the entrance fee at Parken Zoo in the Swedish town of Eskilstuna. This time the public was not there to visit the zoo's white tigers—the park's main marketing focus—but to witness Lee Falk (1911–1991), creator

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of *The Phantom*, officially opening the zoo's latest attraction: *Fantomenland* (*Phantom Land*). "Fantastic. Wonderful. Amazing," were the spontaneous comments picked up by a journalist from the local daily, *Folket*, accompanying Falk around as he inspected the amusement park devoted to his creation. Although an industrial city located outside Stockholm may seem a long way from the exotic jungle environment where the Phantom resides on the comic pages, visitors could enter his home in the ancient Skull Cave, sit on the Skull Throne, inspect the cave's vast treasure trove, roam around a scaled-down replica of a jungle village and, of course, meet and greet the Phantom himself in person. In a later interview with *Princetown Arts*, Falk expressed both joy and astonishment at the global spread and apparent commercial appeal of his character, referring to the theme park as a "modest version of Disneyland."[1]

The Phantom, an adventure series set in the fictional African nation-state of Bangalla, debuted as a daily strip in 1936, making him a pioneer in the superhero genre. Despite his mythical name, however, the Phantom is an ordinary man without the mutant powers often associated with superheroes—from Superman and Green Lantern to Wonder Woman and Aquaman—that rose to fandom around the same period—times that are often referred to retrospectively as the "Golden Age of comics." Although he displays most of the essential characteristics included in definitions of a superhero in recent scholarly work—"enemies, a strong moral code, a secret identity, a costume" (McLain 2009, 1; cf. Coogan 2006; Reynolds 1992)—the Phantom makes up for his lack of extraordinary powers with ingenuity, skill and integrity as he faces everything the criminal world can throw at him. In theory, his abilities are such as any reader could achieve with the right dedication and training. In contrast to most readers, however, the Phantom rights, wrongs and combats evil in all its forms in the dense jungle he calls home ("the Deep Woods") as well as in every corner of the world.

Despite being a lone ranger and subsequently working almost exclusively alone—whether battling pirates on the African coast, taking on organized crime in Italy or resolving a kidnapping drama in Mexico—the Phantom can count on the infinite support of several key characters. A constant companion is Devil, his faithful gray mountain wolf, often mistaken for a dog by others to which the Phantom readily replies: "He's not a dog, he's a wolf." Having developed an understanding only rivaled in comic books by that between Tintin and Snowy, Devil understands almost everything the Phantom tells him and does not shy away from showing

Fig. 1.1 Phantom and Diana finally tie the knot in 1977 before the President of Bangalla (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

his deadly fangs and attacking on command whenever his master is under threat. They are later joined by Hero, a majestic white stallion, gifted to the Phantom by the Maharajah of Nimpore as a reward for rescuing his daughter.[2] Since 1977, the Phantom has been married to his American college sweetheart, Diana Palmer, who appeared in the very first strip. At various points in her adventurous life, she has been an explorer, an aviator, a nurse and an Olympic swimmer. More recently, Diana has worked as a United Nations official. Nine months after their wedding, the couple had twins, Kit and Heloise. The best man at the wedding was Guran, the stocky and diminutive African chief who is the Phantom's best friend. At first represented as a loyal black servant to the white Phantom, he was later upgraded to the position of respected companion (Fig. 1.1).

The Phantom wears one of his signature rings on each hand: the Skull Ring and the Good Mark Ring. Villains and foes came to dread the Sign of the Skull, etched onto the ring worn on his right hand.[3] Whenever the Phantom throws a powerful punch against a villain, the ring leaves a permanent scar in the shape of the skull. The symbol, the Phantom's own mark of Cain, is a grim and permanent reminder of the violent encounter. Akin to the biblical reference, the mark serves as a visual warning to others not to commit crimes. On his left hand—symbolically closer to the

heart—the Phantom wears the matching Good Mark Ring. For generations, the Phantom has bestowed the Good Mark upon those who have saved his life or otherwise come to his aid. Represented by four crossed swords, the symbol is either gently stamped onto the recipients' wrists or gifted as a necklace granting them "the protection of the Phantom for life."

In the absence of superpowers, the Phantom's near mythical qualities are further enhanced by the leitmotif of "Old Jungle Sayings." Falk introduced this dramatic device in narrative captions more than once in a while in the stories. "When the Phantom moves, he shames the lightning," used in the 1946–1947 story "Mister Hog," was the first of many.[4] Falk continued to coin various "Old Jungle Sayings" to illustrate his Phantom stories throughout his career, and by his death, he had created roughly 250 of them, albeit with many variants on the same theme (Goulart 2010). By way of rationalizing, these multiple sayings have been narrowed down to twelve in the Swedish *The Phantom* comic book and have in the process become considered somewhat canonical (Patrick 2017). These include "The Phantom moves as silently as the jungle cat," "The Phantom is rough with roughnecks" and "The Phantom has a thousand eyes and a thousand ears."

Another frequently referenced "Old Jungle Saying," both within and beyond the Phantom series, is "There are times when the Phantom leaves the jungle and walks the streets of the town like an ordinary man," indicating the character's dual identity. Ever since the Phantom superheroes have generally had dual identities—they have been both civilians and superheroes—which comics scholarship define as a trademark of the superhero genre (Reynolds 1992). Be they Superman and Clark Kent, Iron Man and Tony Stark, or Daredevil and Matt Murdoch, they all share the characteristics—alongside colorful outfits and magnificent jawlines—of devotion to justice, substituting on a daily basis their masks and spandex for a civilian outfit. Regularly changing garments also serves as an important plot device, as it allows the extraordinary nature of the superhero to be contrasted with the ordinariness of the alter ego. Whenever the Phantom leaves the jungle, he transforms into his alias Mr. Walker, which means covering his bodysuit with a gray trench coat, scarf and trousers while concealing his unmasked face—presumably a safety precaution as another "Old Jungle Saying" warns that whoever "looks upon the Phantom's face will die a horrible death"—beneath a broad-brimmed hat and dark sunglasses.

Unlike Clark Kent's employment as a reporter for the Daily Planet, Matt Murdoch's daytime job as a lawyer, or Tony Stark running his own industrial company, the Phantom's alter ego is not a recognizable public persona. Nor does he have any ambition to be. This means that the Phantom does not have a civilian occupation or everyday life that is recognizable to most readers, while—like many other superheroes—having to constantly ensure that his true identity as a costumed crime fighter is not exposed to the public. In fact, the Phantom never takes a break from breathing down the necks of the criminal underworld; he is always fighting crime. Subsequently, the only purpose of his urban outfit is to allow him to operate incognito without drawing the kind of attention a black mask and brightly colored outfit may attract among the general public, regardless of whether he is snooping around gritty parts of New York, attending a socialite event in Paris or merely paying his friend, President Lamanda Luaga, a courtesy visit at the Presidential Palace in Mawitaan.

An Immortal Ghost

The legend of the nemesis of evil started four hundred years ago. The current Phantom encountered by readers in the comic strips and books is the twenty-first descendant of an English nobleman, Sir Christopher Walker,[5] whose father was murdered after a vicious pirate attack on his merchant ship off the African coast. Washed up on a remote shore, Sir Christopher realizes that he is the lone survivor from the ship, and the last thing he remembers before falling into the water is witnessing the killing of his father. He later discovers the corpse of his father's murderer and swears a solemn oath on his skull, in an act with overt indebtedness to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, revealing Falk's previous vocation as a playwright. Holding the skull, he pledges "to devote [his] life to the destruction of all forms of piracy, greed and cruelty"—a task to be inherited by the eldest male of each succeeding generation. A dynasty of vigilantes is born. Conveniently, or possibly due to a lack of imagination, all twenty-one generations of Phantoms have been baptized Christopher Walker, shortened as either "Kip" or "Kit"—not to mention the divine luck by which each generation has been able to father a son. This unbroken succession, kept secret for centuries, led many across the globe to believe that he is the same man and he is subsequently believed to be immortal—hence his nickname, "the Ghost Who Walks – the Man Who Cannot Die" (Fig. 1.2).

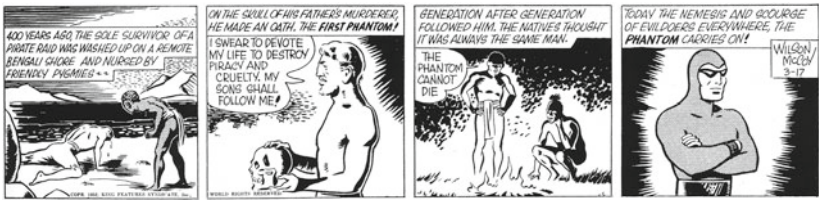
400 YEARS AGO, THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF A PIRATE RAID WAS WASHED UP ON A REMOTE BENGALI SHORE AND NURSED BY FRIENDLY PYGMIES
ON THE SKULL OF HIS FATHER'S MURDERER, HE MADE AN OATH. THE FIRST PHANTOM!
I SWEAR TO DEVOTE MY LIFE TO DESTROY PIRACY AND CRUELTY. MY SONS SHALL FOLLOW ME!
GENERATION AFTER GENERATION FOLLOWED HIM. THE NATIVES THOUGHT IT WAS ALWAYS THE SAME MAN.
THE PHANTOM CANNOT DIE
TODAY THE NEMESIS AND SCOURGE OF EVILDOERS EVERYWHERE, THE PHANTOM CARRIES ON!
WILSON / McCOY 3-17

Fig. 1.2 Background to the Phantom saga (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

Since his first appearance, the Phantom—like preceding generations—has combined the black domino mask with a skintight bodysuit, trunks with diagonal stripes and a pair of riding boots. For Richard Reynolds (1992, 29), costume is fundamental to any superhero as it functions as a "sign for the inward process of character development." Not only does the costume identify the hero as hero, but it also represents the basis of continuity and changes to the costume signify character developments. With stories spanning a period of 400 years, variations to the Phantom's costume also serve to reflect the time period in which each generation of the dynasty lives. Costume changes are perhaps most notable in the Ghost Who Walks' choice of weapons. Where the current Phantom is equipped with a pair of M1911 pistols in a special belt with a skull-like buckle, various ancestors have relied on a different arsenal of sidearms including sable, small sword and flintlock pistols, depending on the historical period.

When the comics were printed in black and white, little thought was given to the actual color of the costume. Nonetheless, Falk was quoted as saying that he had envisioned a gray costume and even considered naming his creation "The Gray Ghost," before settling with "The Phantom." Indeed, the costume was referenced as being gray in early stories like "The Singh Brotherhood"[6] (1936) and "Fisher of Pearls"[7] (1938), but when in 1939 the series debuted as a Sunday strip in the American color supplements, the costume was colored purple. Throughout the publishing history of *The Phantom*, various publishers have granted themselves certain liberties regarding the color of his uniform. The bodysuit was blue in the Nordic countries, red in Brazil, France, Italy and Spain and yellowish-brown in New Zealand, while Australia preferred purple. The various interpretations of the costume's color schemes may seem a marginal detail, but as unthinkable as it would be to imagine Superman

in a yellow costume or Batman in red, the color schemes, in their superficiality, reflect a certain local reinterpretation of the character. Part of the argument that this book advances—which may also explain Sweden's long-lasting love affair with the masked crusader—is that the Phantom is among the most successful examples of the translation and transformation of a popular cultural icon. Akin to the "British Invasion" roughly a decade later, in which a group of talented British creators—most notably Alan Moore, Grant Morrison and Neil Gaiman—made the leap across the Atlantic to redefine the American mainstream comic book scene by infusing characters and storylines with new sets of perspectives and values, a similar phenomenon occurs in *The Phantom* comics but with an even more radical edge. As will be seen, this is not merely a book about the Phantom in Sweden, but is equally a book about Sweden in *The Phantom*, as the comic—during the rise of the New Left and radical social movements—comes to epitomize the rise of political relevance in mainstream comics.

A Phantom Made in Sweden

Based on figures from the *Los Angeles Times*, the Phantom appears in more than 500 newspapers, translated into 40 languages, with 60 million readers daily.[8] The first serial for the big screen based on the adventures of the Phantom was broadcast in 1943, a Hollywood blockbuster starring Billy Zane appeared in 1996, and a futuristic miniseries—in which the suit, as in the case of Iron Man, awards the Phantom special powers—premiered in 2009 to modest attention. Although the Phantom is an American literary creation with a protagonist of British heritage set in an exotic African jungle, the popularity of the comic seems predominately restricted to other regions. In an obituary in *The Guardian* after Falk's death in 1999, renowned comics journalist Paul Gravett mentions that the Phantom has become "a national institution in Australia, New Zealand and much of Scandinavia."[9]

Sweden's first encounter with the Ghost Who Walks came in 1940 when the character appeared as a comic strip in the pages of *Veckorevyn*.[10] A decade later, in 1950, he got his own comic book which, surpassed only by Australian publisher Frew, is the longest running *The Phantom* comic book in the world. This was the beginning of a special relationship. Anyone who, like myself, grew up in Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s will vividly remember, besides reading the actual comic fortnightly, that if a

pilgrimage to *Fantomenland* was not enough to satisfy our appetite for all things the Phantom, we could rehydrate with Phantom soda, eat the masked hero's own sweets, listen to his favorite songs on the compilation CD "Swedish Phantom Hits" (apparently euro techno is a popular genre in the Skull Cave) and enroll in his members' club with, according to Falk, more members than the Scouts, including the current King of Sweden (Lee Falk Memorial Bengali Explorers Club 2011). A recent anthology devoted to the crime fighter is symptomatic of the popularity of *The Phantom* series in Sweden, which is unrivalled by any other superhero comic: It allows various celebrities and other prominent figures, including a former Prime Minister, to discuss what the Phantom means to them while the hero himself poses in front of a Swedish flag on the cover and is referred to in the title as a "blue and yellow hero."[11]

A clue to *The Phantom*'s popularity at the particular moment when the series made its first appearance can be found in its transformation of Africa into a stage on which the heroic European protagonist acts out his personal adventure narrative in the presence of alien people, wild animals and exotic scenery—a scenario which is closer to a rule than an exception in twentieth-century Western literary production. These novels, Marianna Torgovnick (1990) contends, offer a form of escapism; the reader is able to dominate an exotic environment in a way that is not possible in a modern, over-organized society. "The man in the lion skin was a fantasy-projection of the man in the pinstripe suit or on the assembly line," Torgovnick (1990, 43) explains, "caught in a system he had not created and could not control." Replace "lion skin" with mask and spandex and the statement could equally have been about the Phantom. The comic book has the extra advantage that Africa, with all the fears, fantasies and myths that for centuries have been projected onto the continent, can be, like Marcel Proust at his breakfast table, experienced by virtue of aesthetic mediation whose transformative power increases with cultural distance (Spurr 1993). *The Phantom* was far from alone. The period stretching from the 1930s to the end of World War II saw a dramatic increase in comics set in a jungle environment—from *Akim* and *Bomba the Jungle Boy* to *Cave Girl* and *Ka-Zar the Savage*—that all share the trope of white European authority over native people (Costello 2009).

Yet this does not necessarily explain the enduring fascination with the Phantom and the series' notable sustainability in Sweden, with its uninterrupted bi-weekly print run that still continues after more than 60 years. At first glance, this may seem odd. After all, there is a seemingly unresolvable

contradiction between a series that has been labeled "a Colonialist fantasy about Black tribal peoples who live in peace thanks to the guidance of a line of wise and powerful white men" (Peterson 2009, 340) and its continued success in a country that, according to academic commentators, during the 1960s and 1970s developed into the most progressive antifascist and antiracist nation in the West (Hübinette and Lundström 2011), especially given the fact that *The Phantom* reached its peak sales during those decades.

To explain why the Phantom has become an entrenched part of the everyday vernacular in Sweden, comics scholars have pointed out that some of the most active contributors to the series in recent decades have been the Sweden-based creators known as Team Fantomen (e.g., Aman 2018; Gudmundsson 2015; Strömberg 2003). Although they had provided sporadic episodes since 1963, Team Fantomen became an international publication node in *The Phantom* franchise in 1972 when they set up their official production of licensed scripts.[12] According to David Gudmundsson (2015), this gave the editorial team and scriptwriters leverage to tailor plots in accordance with the interests of their implied local readership. Gudmundsson (2015, 21) specifically mentions the increased focus on historical adventures as characteristic of Team Fantomen, suggesting that "[a] consciously applied commercial use of history has contributed to the successes of Fantomen in recent decades." Most interestingly, when Gudmundsson rephrases the argument as part of his conclusion, employing the theoretical framework of cultural memory, he distinguishes the political purposes of cultural memory from commercial ones: "[T]here is a difference, I would argue, in using an historical theme with ideological and political purposes, or with the purpose of presenting an exciting character for commercial uses." Based on the analysis pursued, he draws the conclusion that "the use of history in comics such as Fantomen is primarily commercial – it appeals to a great interest in history in modern society, which helps sell more copies of the comic" (Gudmundsson 2015, 21).

Such an argument not only detaches cultural memory from its social and political underpinnings, it also overlooks the ways in which comic books are, in Jesse Moore's (2003, 263) words, "purveyors of ideology."[13] For all the important merits of Gudmundsson's work, the argument advanced throughout this book is quite the opposite; what I will demonstrate is that the Swedish scriptwriters endow the Phantom with

new political meaning, and that this is a major reason for the popularity of the character. Or put another way, a full comprehension of *The Phantom*'s popularity during the comic's peak years in the 1970s requires an understanding of the ideological climate in which the comic circulated, as the story arc dramatizes social and political issues in such a way that the masked hero seamlessly embodies the dominant ideology of the time. Ensuing chapters discuss the ways in which the comic book speaks up against racism and apartheid, takes a stand for colonized people around the globe by identifying their shared experiences of poverty, social inequality and political violence and challenges patriarchy and dominant gender norms.

The New Left and International Solidarity

It was a time of rebellion, struggle, occupation and strikes. Major student protests in Paris, Prague and Mexico City, urban uprising due to the murder of Martin Luther King in the United States and the occupation of the student union building in Stockholm—these are just a few of the events that led French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1969) to call the mythologized year of 1968 an "explosion." The founding of Team Fantomen coincided with the emergence of the flamingly red '68. In this era of global protest, Marxist ideas that had been declared dead during the early days of the Cold War gained a new lease of life, disseminated from the universities to the media and for a time played a pivotal role in cultural debate. Like elsewhere in Europe, this radicalization of the public sphere in Sweden was carried forward by several heterogeneous movements that, despite their internal differences, shared certain fundamental values: socialism as a common frame of reference, solidarity with the so-called Third World, demands for equality between gender and class, and deepened democracy (Östberg 2008). Although several studies have questioned the actual policy achievements of the events associated with 1968—perhaps best captured by Per Olov Enquist's somewhat crass book title "The times of the cancelled revolts"[14]—others have emphasized the ways in which the sixty-eighters influenced and permanently transformed the realms of politics, society, literature, art and music, as new theoretical perspectives and political agendas were put forward that differed from the traditional left of the postwar period (Berntson and Nordin 2017; Lilja 1991; Ljunggren 2009).

Even if 1968 saw intensified radicalization in Sweden, the wave of radical left-wing politics stretched over several decades—from the close of the 1950s until the dawn of the 1980s—which has historians speaking of the "long 1968" (Östberg 2008). The prelude, as in many other European countries, began with the paradigm shift that occurred as the 1950s transitioned into the 1960s. Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swedish General Secretary of the United Nations from 1953 until his death in a plane crash in 1961, is often accredited with having made the world more visible to a Swedish audience, sparking an interest in internationalism and the work of the United Nations. Without moving too far ahead, ensuing chapters—especially Chapter 3—draw certain parallels between Hammarskjöld and the Phantom in their pursuit of diplomatic and peaceful resolutions to international conflicts. The chilling Cold War winds subsided and the East/West dichotomy was complemented with that of the North/South, as the colonial wars of independence put the so-called Third World's situation on the international agenda. In particular, the wars of independence in Algeria in 1954–1962 and Congo in 1959–1960 received widespread coverage in the Swedish press, marking—as noted by Lars Lönnroth and Sverker Göransson (1990)—the starting point of the international orientation of the Swedish public that would come to characterize the following decade.

The increased focus on international solidarity and the Third World was mirrored in literature, as travel writing rose to prominence during the 1950s and 1960s. Scholars explain the sudden success of this literary genre by pointing out that several of the leading authors were excellent writers—most notably Sun Axelsson, Sven Delblanc, Gun Kessle, Sven Lindqvist, Jan Myrdal and Per Wästberg—but above all due to an increased engagement with, and concern for, the independence of the Third World and the subsequent new political and economic challenges that decolonization entailed (Lönnroth and Göransson 1990). Through an almost exclusively leftist lens, these writers documented and analyzed what they saw, read and experienced before sharing their words with an interested audience.

According to Lennart Berntson and Svante Nordin (2017), 1965 was more important to Sweden than 1968 for its political developments. This was the year of the first public demonstrations against the American war in Vietnam, the works of Karl Marx were republished in Swedish, the Communist Party leader C.-H. Hermansson published his discussion book

Vänsterns väg (*The Way of the Left*) and, most importantly, Göran Therborn introduced the concept of "the New Left" to a Swedish audience in an anthology of the same name. The book was the first, and arguably the most influential, attempt to launch the New Left as a political project and an alternative in Swedish politics (Ekelund 2017). In the introductory chapter, Therborn (1966) sketches out a sociological explanation of the origins of the New Left. In his view, the movement emerged as a response to four profound moral and political crises: imperialism, communism, the Cold War and social democracy. More symbolically, the interconnection and rough simultaneity of pleas for decolonization in the Third World, the brutal Soviet response to Hungarian protests, the so-called balance of terror and the prospect of a world-destroying nuclear war, and the choice facing the welfare state between stagnation and socialist development, paved the way for the New Left, as these events—Therborn explains—came to affect a whole new generation of young people.

Like France's "Nouvelle Gauche," the New Left in Britain, or Germany's "Neue Linke," the New Left in a Swedish context is a signifier for a broad political movement outside of party politics that, in spite of the Marxist elements permeating its language, was not initially a function of economic discontent. Since the New Left emerged at the peak of capitalist expansion and prosperity, at a time when the career prospects of students were bright in Sweden as well as in several other parts of Western Europe, the main focus of its critique was not economic, but political and social—hence a particular focus on post-material values expressed through internationalism and a deep concern for the field of culture and its theoretical influences. It was therefore a sign of the times that writers, artists and other cultural workers played a pivotal part in carrying the project forward (Ljunggren 2009).

Recent studies summarize the New Left more broadly to include the following elements: the fundamental importance of class struggle, opposition to the exploitation of the Third World, the rejection of capitalism and imperialism and the necessity of revolutionary (including armed) struggle, as well as radical ideas advocating gender equality, decentralization and environmental thinking (Hobsbawm 2011). Yet the common denominator in a Swedish context, Kjell Östberg (2002) asserts, was international solidarity. This was expressed through support for people in the Third World and progressive liberation movements, in combination with critique of imperial forces in the industrialized parts of the world contributing to the oppression of countries deemed underdeveloped in the

Global South. In a review of Swedish journals and bulletins from the end of the 1960s, Östberg (2008) demonstrates that international solidarity efforts were spread out all over the globe: the United NLF Groups in support of Vietnam, the Latin American Bulletin, the Palestine Bulletin, the Indonesian Bulletin and Black Power/Scan-SNCC. MPLA in Angola, Frelimo in Mozambique and support for Biafra also had various bulletins as well as solidarity campaigns with Southern Africa, to name but a few. As a token of the depth of focus on issues in the Third World across Swedish society, "international solidarity" was emphasized as a key value in school curricula from 1962 until 1980 (Hedin and Lahdenperä 2000).

What this book shows is that the ideological content of the New Left does not merely become an integrated part of the adventures; the Phantom also fights in its name. In short, during these formative years for Team Fantomen, the Ghost Who Walks is redefined through the prism of New Left ideology in the wake of 1968 where the plots, besides aiming to entertain readers, also inform the reader about the righteousness and validity of the dominant ideological doctrine among the Swedish public at the time, which also impacted on the government's foreign policy. The colonial framing of a comic book about a heroic European protagonist acting out his personal adventure narrative in the presence of alien people and wild animals is, in a Swedish context, transformed into a postcolonial resource. The Phantom is present in that Africa which had been placed center stage in the national political debate. Behind the black mask, his eyes witness the social injustices that solidarity movements in Sweden emphasize, he intervenes in the armed conflicts discussed in the Swedish parliament and he helps the people that Swedish foreign aid seeks to reach. In many ways, especially throughout the 1970s, the Phantom embodies the ambition behind Swedish foreign policy, without having to consider the principle of neutrality, the interests of great powers or diplomatic relationships.

Ideological Comics

To address the impact of the New Left on comics in a Swedish context is to enter previously unchartered territory. Important contributions have been made on the aesthetic dimensions of the birth of the New Left (Ekelund 2017), student revolts (Bjereld and Demker 2005), solidarity movements (Sellström 1999) and other events associated with the leftist radicalization during the 1960s and 1970s, most notably on how

left-wing politics manifests itself through the lens of literature and music (e.g., Arvidsson 2008; Svedjedal 2014). What these studies show is that a great number of writers used different forms of texts for political opinion formation in order to place society and politics under scrutiny (Svedjedal 2014). Children's books and media in particular became caught up in the current of turbulence, protest and counterculture agitation that characterized the era (Widhe 2018), yet none of these studies mention comics—or to be more precise: comic books and graphic novels remain totally absent in these studies. At the same time, academic commentators have repeatedly pointed out the emergence of the cheap paperback in the Swedish book market as key for the dissemination of socialist ideas in connection with 1968 (e.g., Arvidsson 2008; Bjereld and Demker 2005; Hedén 2008). Additionally, others have underlined how popularized fiction became an effective and often used aesthetic form to transmit the political message different writers sought to convey (Svedjedal 2014), without bringing in other wallet-friendly mediums as part of the analysis of the events associated with the period. This is surprising considering that the various leftist groups comprising the sixty-eighters have often been described as youth movements (e.g., Östberg 2002)—a part of the population that is also defined as the main consumers of comic books (DiPaolo 2011).

Speaking in general terms, Jason Dittmer (2005, 628) makes the case that the "seemingly innocent nature" of comics makes it a particularly relevant medium through which to disseminate ideological beliefs and doctrines—while also offering a window to analyze these—as they usually operate beneath the gaze of most cultural critics. Other studies have pointed out that comic books do not merely reflect the ideological landscape in which they circulate, they also comment on and often aim at affecting the dominant values of the nation (Dittmer 2005, 2013; Dodds 2005). Similar to the case of the prominent literary authorships that played an important role among the sixty-eighters such as Staffan Beckman, Sara Lidman or Jan Myrdal, these studies make a point of stressing that popular culture, in general, and comic books, in particular, may either contest or reinforce dominant political understandings.

At the same time, popular culture has been regarded as a threat, especially during the rise of the New Left. Governed by the logic of the market, popular culture is produced for an undifferentiated mass and legitimizes the present order. Theodor Adorno (2001, 104), a foremost representative of this orthodox radical point of view, writes in his influential 1963 essay "Culture Industry Reconsidered" that:

> The concepts of order which it [cultural industry] hammers into human beings are always those of the status quo… you shall conform, without instruction as to what; conform to that which exists anyway, and to that which everyone thinks anyway as a reflex of its power and omnipresence. The power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness.

For Adorno, culture—in his view, artistic forms highly ranked in the cultural hierarchy—has always had an inherent subversive force—a protest against the circumstances under which it is produced. With the emergence of the cultural industry, this feature is lost. Cultural expressions are, Adorno (2001) claims, reduced to commodities in a commercial market appearing in mass. Umberto Eco's (1972) seminal essay on Superman offers a seamless illustration of Adorno's thesis on the ways in which mass culture seeks to preserve and legitimize the ideology of capitalism. Eco identifies anti-narrative as key to the commercial success of the "Man of Steel." As a timeless mythic archetype, Superman is at the same time a constant renewable consumer good. His adventures offer merely the barest illusion of plot; nothing can ever change the original status quo of the narrative. In this way, Eco reveals Superman's universe to be a myth about the end of history. The world we inhabit today is the only one possible, and not even the impossible presence of super empowered aliens can alter the basic social conditions of consumer capitalism. Eco was far from alone in the enterprise of trying to reveal the ideological messages that underlay supposedly innocent and apolitical stories found in comics. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart's (1975) *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, first published in Spanish in 1971 and possibly the best-known example of comics criticism, polemically focuses on the imperialist nature of comics. Through a critical reading of Disney comic books imported into Latin America, in particular Chile, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dorfman and Mattelart reinterpret Disney's influence as a form of cultural imperialism aiming to create

pro-capitalist and US-friendly adults out of Latin American children. Possibly a sign of the times, the book sold 500,000 copies in the 1970s alone (McAllister et al. 2001).

More recent scholarships make similar ideological reflections on the superhero adventure genre. For Dan Hassler-Forest (2012), American superheroes—Batman, Captain America, Spider-Man and all the rest—are reactionary protectors of capitalism with an imperialist leaning. They exemplify the logic of power, Hassler-Forest says, that justifies both capitalist and imperialist violence. For instance, Superman presents himself simultaneously as the avatar of universal principles ("truth and justice") and the physical embodiment of a specific national might ("the American way"). The concept of superheroes operating as embodiments of the nation-state emerges with particular salience in the case of the American market, which can be traced back to the way in which the popularity of comic books skyrocketed during World War II (Bongco 2000). The country's need for patriotic heroes provided superheroes with new enemies like the Nazis and the Japanese, against which Captain America and his unironic flag-waving peers enforced righteous and redemptive violence mirroring the claimed righteous and redemptive violence of the nation in the international realm outside the pages of comics (Dittmer 2013).

However, the patriotism invested in the superhero medium did not fade away in the postwar period; rather, much ink has also been spilt on the ways in which American publishers Marvel and DC Comics throughout the 1960s tended to mirror Cold War foreign policy, marked by ideas that the United States was synonymous with freedom and progress. According to these studies, superhero adventures were often consciously set in a world beset by Communist foes plotting for world domination as various caped crusaders were called upon to save the world from the "Red Scare" (Costello 2009; Dittmer 2013; York and York 2012). Not overlooking scholars who have argued that ideas of the New Left and civil rights movements in the United States were also picked up by comic book creators (e.g., Fawaz 2016; Moore 2003), a substantial portion of the scholarly body identifies the genre of superheroes as a predominately white male-dominated power fantasy (e.g., Gateward and Jennings 2015; Singer 2002) with a conservative leaning (e.g., Curtis 2015; DiPaolo 2011).

The Phantom Comics and the New Left seeks to complicate this view by exploring how *The Phantom*, circulating at the zenith of the New Left and social movements including international solidarity, feminism

and environmentalism during the 1970s, aligns the formal and narrative qualities of a superhero comic book with the political ideals of the New Left and radical social movements. Through a series of close readings of the comic books, alongside fan writing, cultural criticism, political documents and interviews with creators and editors of *The Phantom* comic book, this book's various thematic chapters discuss how topics such as foreign aid and poverty elimination, guerrilla warfare and postcolonialism, socialism and equality are expressed on the pages of the comic book, along with the fight against apartheid, the construction of a co-operative society in the jungle and the Phantom's self-affirmed role as spokesperson for then Prime Minister Olof Palme. What will be seen is how the common denominator is ideology: The Phantom reflects values and embodies a dominant political point of view, of how Sweden sees itself and its role in the world.

In addition to comic book writers increasingly starting to see themselves as social critics during the 1960s (Moore 2003), another explanation for a change in political leanings and representations has been identified in comics as a seemingly "disposable commodity" with slim profit margins (Costello 2009, 4). This leads to the comics industry being responsive to cultural trends. It remains unknown how this translates into the context of the Swedish comics industry, but economic incitements have been discussed in relation to the field of literature and the leftist radicalization in the wake of 1968. For instance, poet Göran Palm, one of the most vocal and prominent figures of the New Left, has with a drop of self-irony commented on his own commercial success, noting that during this period there were few books more profitable than those that engaged in political debates from a leftist perspective. According to Palm, they sold in greater volumes than crime novels or romance fiction (Heurling 1993). The finance division at Semic Press, then publisher of *The Phantom* in Sweden, would hardly disagree. With the introduction of Swedish-produced original stories, the comic book sold an average of 180,000 copies throughout the 1970s, while a couple of issues even surpassed the 200,000 mark. In a recent documentary, editor Ulf Granberg comments that he cannot imagine that an issue of *The Phantom* anywhere in the world has exceeded these sales figures.[15] It is not only a *Phantom* record, he asserts, but also a Swedish record. What was written in *The Phantom* was read, and what this book shows is that the content can also

explain the character's widespread popularity in Sweden as an American-created superhero from a British dynasty residing in Africa that has worn a mask and royal blue tights for centuries.

Outline of the Book

The analysis of the ways in which *The Phantom* comic book series was employed to disseminate New Left ideology, and to impart this ideology to readers, is organized into four chapters, each of which addresses themes that connect the content of the comic to discourses of New Left ideology and international solidarity movements. The first chapter (Chapter 2) analyzes the content of Lee Falk's American scripts, zooming in on the values in terms of race and reductionist stereotyping running through the comic book during its first decades of existence. This historical contextualization and problematization of the American scripts are key, as the public critique directed toward them partly influenced the decision to produce in-house licensed stories in Stockholm. Thus, the following chapter (Chapter 3) shows that Team Fantomen's effects on the Phantom's universe were immediate. It specifically targets the hero's political responses and actions to those conflicts with which he is confronted. The chapter addresses the ways in which contemporary concerns regarding violations of human rights, neocolonial governing through the former colonies' continuous economic dependency on the metropolitan centers and the lack of literacy among black workers were all woven into the comic. What these themes all have in common is that they were an integral part of Swedish foreign policy and aid at the time. Chapter 4 deals with the ways in which *The Phantom* comic book in Sweden was transformed into a leading example of antiracist politics and anti-apartheid protest literature. Southern Africa, with societies benighted by institutionalized racism, is inscribed into the plots, offering a radical attempt to break down the barrier between the comic pages and real-world events. This chapter contends that *The Phantom* played an important part in shaping Swedish public discourse on apartheid, while also helping to establish Sweden as a leading international antiracist voice. The final chapter's (Chapter 5) focus is on gender and the representation of women, arguing that the sexual politics of the series was, by comparison, marginally more progressive than the representations of race. Although Falk made conscious efforts with time to ascribe Diana, the Phantom's wife, a more independent and modern demeanor, this chapter uncovers how he was

unable to move away from the reductionist stereotype that a woman's true place is in the kitchen. This chapter makes the case that Team Fantomen's storyline drastically pushes the gender politics in *The Phantom* in a progressive direction, while also drawing attention to the fact that the artwork still attempts to appease the heterosexual male gaze.

Notes

1. The interview was conducted by Raymond Elman. Published in Princetown Arts 1989 and republished in Lee Falk Memorial Bengali Explorers Club. Scandinavian Chapter (2011) *Lee Falk—Storyteller* (Stockholm: GML).
2. The Maharajah's Daughter (1944–1945) script: Lee Falk; art: Wilson McCoy.
3. There are several conflicting stories about the origin of the Skull Ring. According to Team Fantomen, the first Phantom received the ring as a gift from Swiss alchemist Paracelsus (1493–1541). The original owner of the ring was the Roman Emperor Nero, and the ring was made from the nails used to crucify Christ. See *Fantomen* 17–18/1998, script: Kari Leppänen & Ulf Granberg; art: Kari Leppänen.
4. Mister Hog (1946–1947) script: Lee Falk; art: Wilson McCoy.
5. The first Phantom is also named Christopher Standish in certain versions of the story.
6. The Singh Brotherhood (1936) script: Lee Falk; art: Ray Moore.
7. Fisher of Pearls (1938) script: Lee Falk; art: Ray Moore.
8. These numbers are from the *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1999. *The Guardian*, March 20, 1999, cites even more generous numbers, reporting that *The Phantom* currently appears in over 600 newspapers in nearly 40 countries in 15 languages.
9. *The Guardian*, March 20, 1999.
10. The series' longest run is with the daily broadsheet *Svenska Dagbladet*, in which it has never ceased to appear since its debut in 1942.
11. The book referred is Lee Falk Memorial Bengali Explorers Club. Scandinavian Chapter (2010) *Från lila vålnad till blågul hjälte: Lee Falk's Fantomen* (Stockholm: GML).
12. The first Swedish episode, "The Treasure in the Skull Cave," written by the Swede Bertil Wilhelmsson and drawn by the Turk Özcan Eralp, was published in *Fantomen*, 8/1963.
13. For a more detailed account of ideology in comics, see Barker (1989) or McAllister et al. (2001).
14. My translation. The original Swedish title is: *Berättelser från de inställda upprorens tid* (Stockholm, Nordstedts, 1974).

15. Granberg's statement was made in the Swedish Radio (SR) documentary "Fantomen har kommit på villovägar."

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CHAPTER 2

White Ghost's Burden and Colonial Adventures

Abstract This chapter analyses the content of Lee Falk's American scripts, zooming in on the values in terms of race and reductionist stereotyping running through the comic book. This historical contextualization and problematization of the American scripts is key, as the public critique directed towards them partly influenced the decision to produce in-house licensed stories in Stockholm. What this chapter demonstrates is that in Falk's interpretation, the Phantom dynasty has for centuries shouldered the white man's burden in Africa. It closes off by revealing the ways in which the Swedish bullpen edited Falk's original storylines and dialog to emphasize the disastrous legacy of European imperialism.

Keywords The Phantom · Lee Falk · Colonialism · Jungle Comics · Racism · Imperialism

Leon Harrison Gross was born on April 28, 1911, in St Louis, Missouri. By the time he had sold his first comic strip, *Mandrake the Magician*, he had changed his name to Lee Falk (Goulart 2010). Two years later, in 1936, his other creation, *The Phantom*, made its inaugural appearance as a daily strip. The time when the Phantom was first seen in print was of great importance to Falk, who saw himself as the midwife of a whole genre, viewing mere knock-offs and cheap replicas in other characters combining an outlandish costume with extraordinary deductive capacities and

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fighting skills. “After him came dozens of others,” Falk (2011, 119) later commented, “but no one as good.” Without evaluating the quality of superheroes, it is true that the Phantom made his debut as a newspaper comic strip two years before Superman and three years before Batman. In stark contrast, however, to the two portal figures of DC Comics with their overall exposure, the Phantom has predominantly played a role in the backwaters of readers’ consciousness. At least that holds true in the context of Falk’s birthplace, the United States, where the Phantom was recently described as “the forgotten superhero” (Patrick 2017). Instead, the character’s popularity has been restricted to elsewhere.

Commentators have noted that part of Falk’s prodigy was to create a universe based on an amalgam of adventure movie, matinee serial and pulp fiction novels, which may, at least partly, account for the character’s esteem among comic book readers in different corners of the world (Goulart 2010). Kai Friese (1999), discussing the Phantom’s popularity in India, especially underlines the ways in which Falk successfully borrowed from eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century colonial adventure novels to add strength and dynamism to his plots: The Phantom starts out as a Robinson Crusoe alone in unfamiliar territory, shares characteristics with Mowgli in *The Jungle Book* and mirrors Joseph Conrad’s Mr. Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. Similar to the latter, the Phantom resides in the Skull Cave, while Kurtz sleeps in a hut surrounded by skulls; the Phantom has a credo “to destroy piracy, greed and cruelty,” while Kurtz has his own: “Exterminate all the brutes!” Although with agendas complete at odds, they are both reflections of an obsessed white man on a civilizing mission on the African continent.

Falk himself traced the Phantom’s origins to his own “great interest as a kid in hero stories, the myths and legends – Greek, Roman, Scandinavian, the Songs of Roland, El Cid in Spain, King Arthur.” As a college student, majoring in literature at the University of Illinois, Falk especially admired Rudyard Kipling and Edgar Rice Burroughs. He later went as far as admitting that his own creation was basically “Tarzan with a college degree” (Friese 1999, 15). And like *Tarzan*, *The Phantom* displays all the familiar tropes of the jungle adventure story. Readers of the comic book enter a world of deep and unexplored jungle (at least, unexplored by Westerners) protected by the Phantom’s close allies in the Bandar pygmy tribe who, despite their diminutive size, are feared by all due to their poison arrows. The hero himself resides in the Skull Cave, hidden behind a waterfall in a part of the jungle known as the Deep Woods,

which houses the crypts of his ancestors and a library containing the handwritten accounts of his forefathers' exploits referred to as the "Phantom Chronicles," along with a vast treasure trove of prized possessions gifted to various members of the Phantom dynasty over the centuries.

In addition to ruling the humans in the jungle—the locals are careful not to break the Phantom's declared peace, a *Pax Romana* in the tropics—the Phantom holds authority over the animal world: In his own island playground at Eden, he has taught carnivorous animals not to eat each other. In this reversed version of the "law of the jungle," lions are following the same moral code that the Phantom seeks to instill in neighboring tribes, when he is not passing on similar moral lessons in the urban jungle of the capital Mawitaan in the fictional African nation-state of Bangalla.[1]

European "Africa"

According to Philip Cohen (1987), "jungle" is originally a Sanskrit word meaning a wild, uncultivated place inhabited by threatening animals and spirits. Nineteenth-century colonial administrators later appropriated the word to characterize "native" habits and habitats throughout the empire. In colonial fiction, the jungle remains an appropriate stage set for European exploration. The difficulty of the terrain, its unfamiliarity and dangers (savage beasts, ferocious animals and starving cannibals), Richard Dyer (1997) claims, provide the opportunity for white protagonists to demonstrate their superiority, taming a landscape as wild as its environment and creatures. But for all its affected danger, the hidden stretch of jungle over which the Phantom presides is both safe and familiar to the reader. It is a sanitized version of the jungle where the reader, like the Phantom, escapes mosquito bites.

The location of this jungle, seamlessly tailored for the armchair traveler, has shifted slightly over the course of decades. Falk avoided geographical specificity about the position of Bangalla—or Bengali, as Falk named the country during the early decades of its existence—on the world map, often alluding to the country's partial similarity to existing territories. "It's located partly in Asia," he commented in 1964 "and partly in Africa"—treating both continents as a *terra nullius* on which the Phantom legend could be inscribed.[2] Eventually, the country's location was settled as a former British colony on the east coast of Africa, a continent that has been grappling with invented versions of itself ever since white

Europeans declared it the "dark continent" and set about plundering its people and resources. This fantasy of Africa being without history was politically effective in legitimizing colonialism (Aman 2017). It found its expression in the highest echelons of Western thought and took on the contours of truth. From Hegel's verdict that African cultures were living in a state of timelessness in need of being woken up and Immanuel Kant's views on the rationality differentials between whites and blacks, to John Locke's assumptions on the incapacity of primitive minds (Mills 1997).

In his landmark study on colonial discourse, *The Invention of Africa*, V. Y. Mudimbe (1988) uncovers the ways in which the West effectively fabricated knowledge about Africa, thereby determining the understanding of it, as well as providing the foundation for its subsequent imperialist rule. According to Mudimbe, Africa—or, rather, "Africa"—is a creation of an intricate network of writing that stretches from literary, historical, scholarly accounts to political, military and imperial administrative mechanisms. The former produced Africa for the ensuing acquisition by the latter. European culture, Mudimbe contends, gained its strength and identity by positioning itself as the contrasting image of other regions and cultures around the world. In more clear-cut terms, the colonial populations provided the mirror in which Europe could perceive itself as civilized, enlightened and superior in contrast to an uncivilized, primitive and inferior Other. In the case of Africa, explorers—anthropologists, writers and missionaries—brought back new proof which could explicate "African inferiority."

If there is no shortage of studies that analyze imperial writing on Africa and other texts deeply rooted in the colonial projects of various European countries (e.g., Boehmer 2002; Hållén 2011; Mbembe 2001), comics have received similar attention less often. The Phantom may have been the first, but he was certainly not alone. The decades following on from the late 1930s saw a flood of comic books on heroes that made the jump to Africa. Not least among these is the Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*, which, as Mark McKinney (2011) has meticulously demonstrated, has a long history—a history that runs parallel to the countries' own imperial projects—of colonialist and white supremacist representations in comics. William H. Young (1969), in his study on pre-World War comics, argues that "Jungle Comics" proved especially popular around the years roughly preceding and following World War II, where the three main jungle-themed adventure strips of the period—*Jungle Jim*, *Tarzan* and *The Phantom*—each championed the idea of one man imposing order on a chaotic land. In this

sense, comics are no different from literature or journalism in often purveying images of inhabitants across Africa as unprotected by the restraining constructs of advanced civilization and modernity (Spurr 1993).

Postcolonial "Africa"

As part of determining Bangalla's geographical location, Falk also adjusted the political status of the nation in the 1960s to be independent from the colonial power of Great Britain, allowing him to allude on occasion to the political upheavals and revolutionary wars that marred parts of Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. The most concrete example is the 1962 story "The Mysterious Ambassador," which plays out against the backdrop of Bangalla's first democratic election after having gained independence.[3] General Bababu, one of the few recurring villains in *The Phantom*, loses to Dr. Lamanda Luaga who is consequently sworn in as the nation's first elected president. Unable to accept defeat, Bababu initiates a civil war in order to overthrow Luaga before the Phantom, granted a UN emissary mandate, interferes and saves both the newly elected president and the fragile democracy of an independent postcolonial state (Fig. 2.1).

Although General Bababu is nothing but a cliché—a ridiculous operetta figure: chubby, evil and despotic—academic commentators have argued that General Bababu, under Falk's guidance, came to personify the political instability of postcolonial Africa (Patrick 2017). This does little to avoid attributing electoral turmoil, by implication, to the African character rather than historical causes, as if the inhabitants of Bangalla, or other non-fictional African nation-states, were somehow incapable of

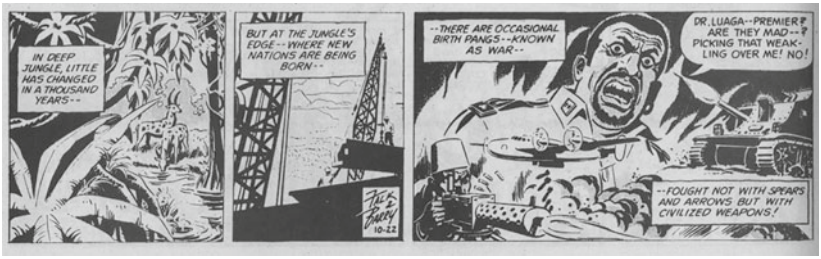
IN DEEP JUNGLE, LITTLE HAS CHANGED IN A THOUSAND YEARS--
BUT AT THE JUNGLE'S EDGE--WHERE NEW NATIONS ARE BEING BORN--
--THERE ARE OCCASIONAL BIRTH PANGS--KNOWN AS WAR--
DR. LUAGA--PREMIER? ARE THEY MAD--? PICKING THAT WEAKLING OVER ME! NO!
--FOUGHT NOT WITH SPEARS AND ARROWS BUT WITH CIVILIZED WEAPONS!

Fig. 2.1 After losing the presidential election to Dr. Luaga, General Bababu starts a civil war (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

comprehending the value of political stability (Spurr 1993). In the Phantom's Africa, madness and revolution always seem close to the surface, which adds further legitimacy and weight to the Phantom's presence as a relentless protector of justice and human rights. Akin to the rhetoric employed by colonial powers to justify their overseas territories, the Phantom, affirmed by his white skin and Anglo-Saxon genes, embodies righteous law and order in a chaotic environment among people who are unable to govern themselves.

In this particular story, the collision between the worlds of what is modern and what is not (yet) modern comes to the fore as the Phantom summons all the jungle's chiefs to act as jury members—the Ghost Who Walks himself is, naturally, the judge—as General Bababu stands trial for his crimes. Where the chiefs rely on primitive forms of law based on reciprocity and merciless scales of punishment ("If he is a thief – hang him"), the Phantom, again, is the civilized voice of reason ("No, chiefs. A fair trial"). The chiefs instantly recognize the white man's superiority ("We are all rulers of the jungle as you said but you are the ruler of the jungle"), which is further enhanced by Sy Barry's drawings of the Phantom in a thinking posture as white light surrounds him against an otherwise dark background. Equally powerful, and often used as a metaphor for colonialism bringing light to the darker parts of the world, the panel is a typical example of how colonialists desired to be looked upon by the lesser species: as noble, civilized and inspiring teachers (Fig. 2.2).

Moreover, the conviction that only a European presence could contain or convert the wild African jungle to white civilization was reinforced by Falk's introduction of the Jungle Patrol in 1951. The remit of this elite paramilitary force—modeled on the French Foreign Legion—is to

YOU WISH US TO JUDGE THIS MAN, O GHOST WHO WALKS?
CORRECT.
WE ARE ALL RULERS AS YOU SAID. BUT YOU ARE THE RULER OF THE JUNGLE. IF YOU DON'T LIKE THIS BABABU--
--AND IT IS OBVIOUS YOU DO NOT-- THEN LET HIM BE KILLED. END THE MATTER.
NO, CHIEFS. A FAIR TRIAL.
WELL SAID.
TRIAL BY FIRE?
THIS IS WISDOM.
THE PHANTOM'S HAVING PROBLEMS--AND WILL HAVE MORE --
FALK & BARRY 5-11

Fig. 2.2 Ghost Who Walks instructs the bloodthirsty chiefs of the jungle that General Bababu will have a fair trial (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

police the dense wilderness of the Deep Woods and six neighboring countries, functioning as an extension of the Phantom's authority in the jungle (Patrick 2017). Originally staffed entirely by white personnel, Falk made gradual changes to the diversity of the patrolmen and eventually replaced the white Colonel Weeks with the black Colonel Worubu as its highest ranking officer, who remains accountable to the orders of the organization's unknown leader: the Phantom. Despite the changes made to the demographic makeup of the Jungle Patrol, it does little, according to Richard Patteson (1978, 115), to dispel the view that the Phantom remains a modern-day prime example of the nineteenth-century imperialist novel, which conveyed the necessity of "white civilization" to establish "European authority over native peoples."

Patteson was far from alone. Several academic commentators have labeled *The Phantom* comic as racist: the product of a colonialist era full of imperialist fantasies (e.g., Lundin 1971; Strömberg 2012). Furthermore, widespread criticism in the Swedish media of pejorative racial themes and imagery in *The Phantom* comic book—best illustrated by the "The Phantom is a fascist!" headline in *Fönstret*, the journal of the Workers' Educational Association (ABF), in autumn 1969—also played a part in the Swedish creators' decision, as will be seen in the forthcoming chapters, to make radical adjustments to the universe of the Ghost Who Walks. Colonialist ideology—specifically, white supremacy—is especially pervasive in the paternalistic relationship that the Phantom dynasty has established over the centuries with the apparently primitive and uncivilized people of the jungle. Without the presence of white Westerners to maintain order, the jungle would slip back into chaos and barbarism in a matter of minutes—or, at least, so the comic argues. "We would be helpless! Without the Phantom's peace, there would be wars – killing." Guran once commented on the essentialness of the Phantom's authority in the jungle: "He is our protector."

War Hero

For decades, Falk turned a deaf ear to accusations of racism. Asked in 1964 to comment on allegations about racial stereotyping in the series, Falk says that he is "baffled" by such claims before adding that "I actually cannot see one hint of racism in my stories."[4] However, in 1988, he admitted to negative representations affirming that "[w]e were racists back then,"[5] where the use of a general "we" can be read as a rhetorical

strategy to limit his individual responsibility by alluding to a claimed dominant way of thinking at the time. Contrary to what may be expected, the racist representations to which he admits do not include the black population surrounding the Phantom in the jungle. Instead, Falk's confession of racism is limited to Japan.

"I really didn't like the Japanese," Falk (2011, 223) explained in an interview in 1988. "After Pearl Harbor and the prison camps, we treated them as the crooks they were." Published in 1942–1943 during the aftermath of Japan's attack on the Hawaiian naval base, "The Inexorables" is a daily strip filled with the rage and indignation of a nation that has been attacked.[6] Instead of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese invade Bangalla in the hopes of cutting off Allied supply lines. The Phantom is faced with the challenge of holding off the large Japanese armies while awaiting support from the Allies. Although no references are made to America, the words coming out of the Phantom's mouth are consciously American. The masked hero draws a dividing line between "free men" and those who are "taught to obey without thinking," caricaturizing differences between liberal democracies and totalitarian regimes, and spouts American war propaganda ("We will unite, we will fight together!") (Fig. 2.3).

In line with the racist color metaphor of the "Yellow Peril," depicting people from Asia as a menace to the West, the Japanese soldiers are brutal and merciless and do not hesitate to torture their prisoners—men and women alike ("We know no law. Only the law of the knife! So… speak… while you can!"). To defend Bangalla from the Asian invaders, the Phantom goes as far as to violate the very rule he has promised not to break:

WITH KURACHI GONE, THE JAPS ARE LEADERLESS --- THEY STARE ABOUT DUMBLY ---?
THEN RUN FOR COVER, IN A PANIC ---
THEY'RE TAUGHT TO OBEY WITHOUT THINKING -- BUT WHEN THERE'S NO ONE TO TELL THEM WHAT TO DO -- THEY'RE LOST/ THAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BE-TWEEN FREE MEN AND ROBOTS/

Fig. 2.3 Racist caricatures of Japanese soldiers and the Phantom's summary of what distinguishes the "free" men from others (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

to kill. His wife-to-be, Diana, with tears in her eyes, listens carefully as the Phantom laconically justifies his reconsidering of ethical principles ("This is war"). Extraordinary circumstances seem to require equally extraordinary measures.

In addition to Falk's script, Ray Moore's drawings rely heavily on racist caricatures. Comic books were an integral part of the Allied propaganda machine during World War II. Writers coined epithets like "Japanazi" and artists drew vicious Japanese soldiers with thick glasses and prominent teeth (Savage 1990). All of these visual tropes, in combination with a desire to emphasize the bestiality of the enemy, are present on the cover of the summer 1943 issue of *The Human Torch* in which the flaming hero burns the arm off a Japanese soldier to prevent him from torturing a white woman with a sword.[7] The pages in other superhero comics contained similar visual representations in combination with racial anti-Japanese slurs. Captain America notoriously referred to a Japanese soldier as "yellow monkey," Wonder Woman fought her stereotypically Asian nemesis Egg-Fu and the Justice Society of America threw the word "Jap" around when intervening against malicious Japanese militaries.[8]

On one level, it hardly comes as a surprise that comic books created just before or during World War II sought to take advantage of nationalist sentiments expressing racist views. Nevertheless, as Caroline Bressey (2008) makes abundantly clear, it is not enough to merely suggest that "this is how it was" or, to paraphrase Falk, claim that "this is how we were." After all, strong antiracist sentiments were expressed against bigoted slurs in public, although public memory conveniently often neglects these events (Bressey 2008). In the case of *The Phantom*, critics had, in addition to the critical voices accounted for above, targeted the racial politics of the comic book as early as 1943 for its frequent portrayal of black people as "ignorant, superstitious colored people" and propagating "hatred and mistrust of foreign people" (Kessel 1943, 350) (Fig. 2.4).

Albeit on a predominantly superficial level, it needs to be acknowledged that Falk gradually polished the imperialist framing of the storyline—turning Bangalla into a postcolonial state, installing the progressive black Dr Lamanda Luaga as president of the nation and, as mentioned a few pages back, replacing the white, Irish-born Colonel Weeks as the commander of the Jungle Patrol with the black Colonel Worubu, to mention a few of the more salient initiatives. Reflecting similar real-world place name changes throughout sub-Saharan Africa in the wake of decolonization during the 1960s and 1970s, the capital of Bangalla was

WHERE IS KURACHI?
I TOOK HIM DOWN WITH ME--TO THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE-BUT I DIDN'T BRING HIM UP-
THIS IS WAR.
BUT LIEUTENANT KURACHI HAS COME UP--AS FAR AS HE'LL EVER GO--
7-3

Fig. 2.4 Phantom justifies his killing of a Japanese officer (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

also renamed from the European-sounding Morristown to the Afrocentric Mawitaan.[9] However, all of this was done without necessarily allowing his insights into past sins to push his lead character to openly condemn racist policies. Nonetheless, as Keith Aoki (1996, 14) contends, deeply held racist images of Asians share troubling historical roots with widely circulated representations of other non-white groups. Striking parallels exist throughout American history in popular culture through representations of degrading racial stereotypes of blacks, Hispanics and indigenous people (e.g., Costello 2009; Savage 1990; Strömberg 2012).

Falk (2011, 78), however, maintained that African Americans loved the Phantom "because he has always seen black people as equal human beings." Even if Falk himself is firm in his belief that he produced a progressive and possibly antiracist comic book due to what he refers to as the symmetry and respect characterizing the Phantom's relationship with non-white Africans, the plot nonetheless still offers a prime example of what is conceptualized as a "white savior complex" (e.g., Hughey 2014; Fitzgerald 2013). If Eurocentrism and cultural supremacy have produced a sense among Westerners that they live at the center of the world, that they have a responsibility to help others and that "people from other parts of the world are not fully global" as Gayatri Spivak (2008, 23) suggests, this holds equally true on the pages of comic books. The trope of the "white savior" is so intensely entrenched in Western popular culture, Matthew Hughey (2014) claims, that varied intercultural contacts are often guided by a racial logic that separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those in need of redemption (non-whites).

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the storyline on how a sixteenth-century British sailor became the first Phantom.

The Resurrection of Christopher Walker

Although Falk never employed reboots, to clean the slate and in order to radically alter the storyline in tune with changing social mores, the alterations made to the Phantom's universe included—in addition to the changes already mentioned above—the way in which the numerous African characters in the series started to assume more prominent roles within the series such as the changes in personnel at the Presidential Palace and the Head of the Jungle Patrol. Kevin Patrick (2017) argues that Falk also went as far as to rewrite the origin story of how the pygmy tribe, the Bandars, came to be his trusted allies. Without dismissing Patrick's analysis of this episode, "The First Phantom,"[10] as an example of Falk seeking to push the comic book in a progressive direction in keeping with the times, the story enhances the white savior complex rather than challenging it.

Back on the shore, the encounter between the wounded and exhausted English survivor and the members of the pygmy tribe that find him has a broader backstory. Instead of leading the white stranger directly to the hidden and remote Skull Cave, he is informed that the Bandars are the slaves of another local tribe ("as they nursed me to health… they explained… they were a small band who'd escaped their masters"): the Wasaka. With resemblances to European colonialists, the Wasaka exploit the Bandars as forced labor. Their only hope was, as explained by the caption, the old legend of a liberator emerging from the sea. As they discover Walker's wounded body on the beach, the Bandars are certain that their prayers have finally been answered. Enhanced by the artwork filled with hefty tones of Christian symbolism, the Messiah has arrived—and just like Christ, the white man gets up and stretches out his arm in a welcoming gesture to the recipients of his words, words with a solemn promise to help them against their oppressors ("I'll try to free your people"). Another similarity to Christ is that Walker's motives are altruistic to such an extent that his actions in the service of humanity will bring him devoted followers for centuries. Each new generation of the Phantom dynasty can count on the loyal and faithful support of the Bandars (Fig. 2.5).

"WHEN THEY FOUND ME..WASHED ASHORE..THEY THOUGHT THE PROPHECY WAS FULFILLED...
THE MAN FROM THE SEA..!
HE HAS COME!
"THIS," THE FIRST PHANTOM WROTE, "WOULD BE MY FIRST TASK.."
I WILL TRY TO FREE YOUR PEOPLE...

Fig. 2.5 White stranger benevolently promises to help the Bandars (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

However, in order to liberate the Bandars, Walker is forced to face their oppressors. In line with the myth of the African jungle hiding various strange creatures, the Wasaka tribe—in contrast to the pygmy Bandars—are abnormally tall. Falk was not alone in his craft. As David Spurr (1993) explains, Africa continually provides writers with material of a special nature: the exotic, the grotesque and the bizarre. Albeit with some reservations ("My first sight of Wasaka filled me with dismay. They were giants!"), the shipwrecked Walker, as a token of his civilized English manners, enters the Wasaka village disclosing his noble aims to pledge for the release of the Bandars ("I come in peace"). Seemingly unaware of both the social conventions of the English gentry and the seeds of European diplomacy, the Wasaka, indicative of their brutality and wilderness, swiftly add Walker to their list of prisoners.

The next panel shows Walker tied to an altar in front of a demon idol made from stone with clear resemblances to the mythical persona we know he soon will adopt. Being just as superstitious as any other group inhabiting the space that becomes the Phantom's protecting grounds for generations, the Wasaka informs him that the totem will decide his faith ("he will protect you… or destroy you"), as Walker—in a language with explicit colonial overtones—makes it clear that he is alone in his situation ("My little jungle friends watched helplessly"). When large vultures land on his bare chest, it looks like his days are numbered. To Walker's great surprise, the Bandars throw rocks at the birds, helping him to escape ("Never before had they dared invade their masters' village"), hinting at how the presence of the white savior from the ocean instills enough

"I SAW THE CRUEL BEAKS, AND THE GIANTS' CRUEL JOKE. JUDGEMENT OF THE IDOL! I SHOUTED, TRYING TO SCARE THEM OFF... THEY DIDN'T SCARE..."
NO...GO!
"THEN I UNDERSTOOD! VULTURES WERE COMING! OBVIOUSLY... THEY HAD FED HERE BEFORE!

Fig. 2.6 Walker is tied to an altar beneath a demon idol of a familiar figure (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

courage in them to do something they had never dare to do in the past (Fig. 2.6).

Walker's elevated social status manifests itself again as they prepare an attack to free the Bandars from their oppressors once and for all. In fact, the relationship between the Phantom and the Bandars exemplifies, in miniature, certain versions of colonial discourse. It enacts a fantasy of Western superiority being willingly recognized and rewarded by the "natives," typical in Western writing about Africa (Torgovnick 1990). Walker may have arrived as a castaway outsider, but he is adopted by the Bandars who project their hopes and dreams onto him. Walker establishes first his fellowship, then his superiority (on the prevailing first-among-equals model, recognized by the Bandars) and then his benign mastery (Torgovnick 1990). To underscore the voluntary basis on which the Bandars acknowledge Walker's superiority, the next panels show frightened warriors plead Walker to lead them in battle ("We are afraid… we cannot fight the giants… unless you lead us"). True to his biblical status among the locals, Walker's reaction evokes a familiar verse from the Old Testament: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36) (Fig. 2.7).

As a benign master, Walker, assuming the white man's burden of leading the Bandars, teaches his "children" skills he deems useful—focusing on how they can use the surrounding landscape to their advantage. When informed that a local berry is poisonous, he dips arrows in the fruit juice and thereby creates the weapon that will instill fear in the jungle for centuries. The reader is assured that part of the Bandars' redemption—as

"AFTER GENERATIONS OF SLAVERY, THEY WERE STILL AFRAID, EVEN WITH THEIR POISON WEAPONS.
WE ARE AFRAID--WE CANNOT FIGHT THE GIANTS--
--UNLESS YOU LEAD US.
"I HAD AN IDEA. I REMEMBERED THE DEMON IDOL OF THE WASAKA GIANTS.
CAN YOU FIND SOME CLOTH--?

Fig. 2.7 Bandars plead to Walker to lead them in battle (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

well as their future elevated status—is a consequence of a single white man's superior logical thinking and mastery of nature that enables him to make use of the local flora to their benefit. In short, the Bandars inform, Walker draws conclusions. In addition to the poisonous arrows, Walker sews an outfit resembling the Wasaka totem statue which, the caption reveals, becomes the first Phantom costume. The mere sight of Walker in his costume makes the Wasaka tremble with fear, immediately accepting the release of all slaves. As a token of their gratitude, the Bandars show Walker a cave carved into the shape of a skull and ask him to stay and live with them. We already know his answer.

Gold Fever in the Americas

Although the previous sections have discussed in detail the ways in which colonial discourse is ingrained into the Phantom universe, this has thus far been done without overt references to colonialism itself. Nevertheless, the argument can equally be made that the backstory to the Phantom mythology is structured around colonialism. Edward Said (1994), most notably, has shown how profoundly imperialism structures Western literary culture, to the extent that many esteemed works assume and depend on the existence of empire for the lifestyles of the characters, for plot reversals and resolutions, regardless of whether or not the text itself has an apparent interest in imperialism.

Taking Hergé's *Tintin* as an example, McKinney (2011) has fruitfully employed Said's analysis to comics. In the album *Le secret de la Licorne* (*The Secret of the Unicorn*) (1943), Tintin and Captain Haddock set out

to retrieve the lost treasures of an illustrious ancestor of the latter, the sea captain François de Hadoque, by retracing his voyages: first to the Caribbean island where Hadoque's ship sank, continuing to the tropical island where he made his escape and eventually back to his castle in Europe. By the end of the voyage, Tintin and Captain Haddock have recovered much of the cargo that Hadoque had been transporting when pirates attacked his ship.[11] According to McKinney (2011), it is likely that Hadoque was involved in the slave trade that structured commerce between Europe, Africa and the Americas, which would explain the various destinations his ship visited. In the following album, *Le trésor de Rackham le rouge* (*Red Rackham's Treasure*) (1944), Captain Haddock purchases his ancestor's castle in which they eventually discover the treasure, hidden by Hadoque inside a statue.[12] As well as giving rise to Captain Haddock's social promotion as a man of wealth, thus enabling him to embrace a bourgeois lifestyle, McKinney (2011) proposes that, although this is never explicitly stated in the series, the colonial inheritance funds the subsequent world travels of both Haddock and Tintin. In sum, imperialism plays an unacknowledged part in structuring the plot.

In the case of the Phantom, the references to colonialism are more explicit. Although the European export of slaves from Africa commenced in the fifteenth century, it was not until the early 1600s that the English fully entered the colonial enterprise and the subsequent triangular trade (Adler and Pouwels 2007). Without any available information regarding a possible employer from elsewhere, it seems unfair to suggest, or even insinuate, that the British merchant ship carrying Captain Christopher Walker and his son, who will become the first Phantom, which is attacked by pirates on the east African coast in 1536, is actively participating in the slave-based colonial economy. After all, neither Falk nor any other Phantom writer has explored this part of the dynasty's backstory. Yet in line with Said's analysis above, empire building is still key to the plot as it determines the lifestyles of the protagonists and reversals in the story. This holds especially true in the case of the first Phantom's father.

The Sunday strip from 1969, "Walker's Table,"[13] one of the few stories focusing on his life, reveals that as a youngster in 1492 the father of the first Phantom enrolled as cabin boy with Christopher Columbus on the voyage to find a new sea route to Asia, but ended up ashore in the Americas. The Phantom reads aloud from the chronicles of his ancestor, a recurrent narrative mode Falk employed in stories building on past members of the Phantom dynasty, as the image shows the cabin boy Walker

standing right next to Columbus, about to make landfall on shores previously unknown to Europeans. In line with the colonialist presupposition that the land and its resources belong to those who are best able to exploit them according to the values and interests of European commercial and industrial systems (Spurr 1993), the following panel zooms in on the Italian explorer as he baptizes the island "San Salvador" while pronouncing that it is now property of the Spanish Crown. The conquest of America had begun (Fig. 2.8).

Yet Columbus seems disillusioned. The Phantom's narrative voice explains that the adventurous sea captain was expecting "gold-roofed palaces and silk-clad courtiers" but instead encounters "rude huts and naked savages." A possible source of small comfort to Columbus is that Walker, in a textbook example of sidestepping all complexities of intercultural contact, settles in with ease: He immediately picks up the language, grows accustomed to the local seeds and learns the local rituals ("He learned the native tongue – became a translator"). When the time comes for Columbus to return to Spain, Walker decides to stay. A panel shows a waving Columbus, on board on his ship, saying farewell to his loyal cabin boy as the caption announces that "Columbus returned to Spain on board 'La Niña'. He brought with him 10 natives, parrots, lizards… but no gold…" It is also noteworthy that this description of the cargo on board La Niña mentions the forced transportation of humans alongside birds and reptiles. For readers who may have wished to see Walker object to the shipping of living cargo, the next panel is a disappointment.

COLUMBUS'S FIRST LANDFALL IN THE NEW WORLD, OCT 12, 1492!
I CLAIM THIS LAND IN THE NAME OF FERDINAND AND ISABELLA, SOVEREIGN RULERS OF SPAIN!

Fig. 2.8 Columbus initiates the conquest of the Americas by claiming the land in the name of the Spanish court, *Los Reyes Católicos* (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

Walker discloses to a native friend, Caribo, that his reason for remaining a settler comes down to his desire to feed Columbus' appetite for gold. Walker explains while waving back to Columbus: "I want to help him. He believes there are golden cities in the west! We will find them for him!" (Fig. 2.9).

The grammatical use of personal pronouns is key in Walker's statement in order to grapple with implicit messages of white supremacy. After proclaiming that *he* wants to help Columbus, Walker instantly informs Caribo that *they* are going to find the golden cities for him. In spite of their friendship, the hierarchies between the white European visitor and the brown indigenous local are clear: The former instructs and the latter obeys. With a local by his side who immediately slips into the position of loyal servant—this episode's equivalent of Robinson Crusoe's Friday, the Lone Ranger's Tonto or more closely related, the Phantom's Guran—the cabin boy Walker sets out on a journey around parts of today's Central and North America and, akin to the *conquistadors* who would follow in his footsteps just a few years later, he is determined to locate cities enshrined in gold.

An entire tradition in Western literature, from captivity stories such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* to Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, has been built around this penetration of the interior spaces of non-European people. Faithful to this literary tradition, Walker entering the interior ensures a confrontation of cultures takes place face to face, or rather eye to eye, between clothed Europe and

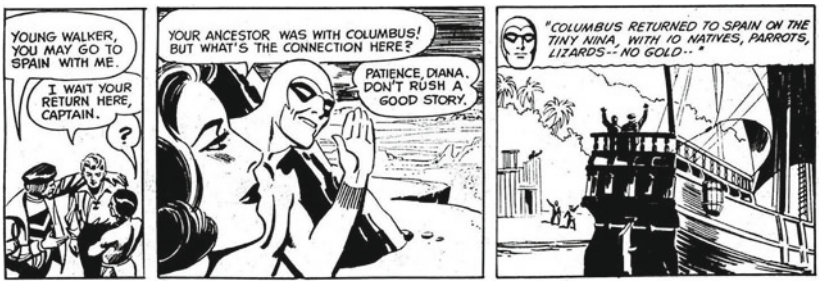
YOUNG WALKER, YOU MAY GO TO SPAIN WITH ME.
I WAIT YOUR RETURN HERE, CAPTAIN.
?
YOUR ANCESTOR WAS WITH COLUMBUS! BUT WHAT'S THE CONNECTION HERE?
PATIENCE, DIANA. DON'T RUSH A GOOD STORY.
"COLUMBUS RETURNED TO SPAIN ON THE TINY NINA, WITH 10 NATIVES, PARROTS, LIZARDS-- NO GOLD--"

Fig. 2.9 Walker informs Columbus that he wishes to remain as the Phantom lists the cargo on board the ship returning to Spain (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

naked America, between civilization and wilderness. What is interesting here is not that the expedition turns out to be in vain—they never find any gold—but the ways in which the indigenous population is represented as they encounter the Mayas. As evasive as the script is in pointing out the effects that the arrival of Columbus would have on the indigenous population—genocide, enslavement, diseases and plundering—Falk is keen to highlight the less flattering cultural practices of the Mayas. Unlike, to use the Phantom's narrative voice, the "naked savages" in their "rude huts," the European expedition first discovers that "the Mayans created a great civilization," but soon moves over to affirm their taste for "human sacrifice." Consequently, the reader does not have to turn the page before Caribo is captured by the Mayas, who decide to sacrifice him to the gods.

Another vital narrative trope in the great European eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century adventure novel is the fantasy of fear: the risk of being imprisoned or ritually slaughtered by remote and strange brutes. The theme's persistent popularity in literature, however, does little to dispel the fact that it remains, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1992, 114) contends, "the most worn-out cliché about non-Western peoples." Nevertheless, the platitude of the motif is possibly of minor comfort to Caribo as he is chained to an altar, ready to be sacrificed as a gift to pagan gods. Just in the nick of time before the dagger penetrates his heart, Walker intervenes by firing shots from his rifle in the air as the caption underlines both his braveness and his undivided loyalty to his indigenous friends ("Kit was risking his own life. But he had to try to help his friend") (Fig. 2.10).

"— AND HUMAN SACRIFICE!"
PHANTOM TALE, 1493: "AS YOUNG CARIBO WAS ABOUT TO BE A LIVING HUMAN SACRIFICE--"
SY BARRY
KRAK!
"KIT WAS RISKING HIS OWN LIFE, BUT HE HAD TO TRY TO HELP HIS FRIEND--"

Fig. 2.10 Caribo about to be ritually sacrificed before young Walker comes to the rescue (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

The sound of gunfire scares the Mayas, who had never seen or heard a firearm before. The Phantom, reading aloud from the chronicles, explains to his stunned wife that this was "[a] historic moment. The first sound of gunfire in America!" while also declaring that his ancestor's journey as a whole is "one of the greatest unrecorded adventures in all history." Besides revealing the Phantom's privileged locus of enunciation—deciding what renders an event historical is always done from a position of power—the declaration also determines from where he speaks. Even if he resides in Bangalla, the Phantom narrates history from the geopolitical locus of the West—implying that Falk writes with an exclusively Western audience in mind—in which gun smoke signals the advent of modernity to the American continent. This is not to suggest that firearms, within as well as beyond the comic pages, did not facilitate their imperial expansion in conquering the Americas for the Spanish and Portuguese armies (e.g., Burbank and Cooper 2010), but describes how they carry a certain symbolic meaning.

To reveal the geopolitical perspective from which history tends to be written, Eric Wolf (1982) uses "People without History," a metaphor that emphasizes the epistemic power differential that placed both continents and people outside of history before the arrival of European eyes to testify to their existence. In this sense, being part of history is a privilege of European modernity, which also explains why today the narratives of modernity almost universally point to Europe as the principal site where, to borrow from Homi Bhabha (1994, 301), "newness enters the world." Gunfire, then, is read as a token technological advancement, further degrees of modernization, based on certain European parameters of development. Hence, the Phantom becomes the authoritative voice writing the history of people claimed to be without by, in a self-congratulatory mode, sanctioning how "newness" entered what is, from a European horizon, the "New World" with his ancestor's great, yet undocumented, arrival in the capital of the Mayas and the subsequent shots fired. In short, instead of connecting the presence of the white European among the Mayas to the forthcoming history of Europe cutting open the veins of the indigenous populations by initiating the destruction of their empires, stripping a whole continent of memories, exuberance and manpower, a symbol of that destruction—the import of guns to the Americas—is here celebrated while simultaneously silencing and marginalizing crucial aspects of reality (Aman 2009).

The gunfire is nonetheless a successful derivative maneuver as the two friends make their escape. Unknowingly, they are in for a final surprise. The sight of Walker, in combination with his thunderous rifle, makes the indigenous troops start worshiping the white man. Raising their hands to the sky, they bow to his pale-skinned presence. He was, the caption explains, unaware of "the legend among these people – of the golden haired god" (Fig. 2.11).

Beyond continuous allegiance to the colonialist adventure novel, this sequence follows two well-proven tropes in Western writings on non-European people. Although the Phantom accredits the Mayas with having created "a great civilization," the emphasis on their bestiality and the wildness of the indigenous population (the ritual sacrificing of humans), as well as their superstition and ignorance (confusing a human being with God), serves to point out their shorthanded development as human beings—in short, how *they* are different from *us*. From the angle of cultural evolutionism applied to other regions in colonial discourse, they are caught in a midway stage between the primitive and the civilized. Additionally, the passage illustrates the courageousness and loyalty of the white European who refuses to leave his friend behind, risking his own life in the process. For readers who are already acquainted with generations of Kit Walker's future offspring, this comes as no great surprise.

Although Falk uses the sequence to demonstrate how altruism and heroism ran in the family even before the Phantom dynasty began, several academic commentators have uncovered the motif of what Spivak (1988, 297), with customary sharpness, has formulated as "white men saving

Fig. 2.11 Corridors of Mayas worshiping Walker's blond presence, as the two friends make their escape (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

brown women from brown men"; that is, the narrative in which privileged white subjects enter another cultural context and rescue non-whites from their plight. Kit Walker is the white man rescuing—being a savior is almost always a masculine position—whereas the gender Caribo identifies with is of minor importance. After all, to need rescuing is, Brenda Boyle (2011) explains, to be feminine. A stalwart theme of colonial discourse is, while casting Europe as dominant patriarchal force, the feminizing of the other continents and their inhabitants—to produce the colonized as a feminized Other (McClintock 1995). In this sense, the two friends, Kit and Caribo, play their respective roles to perfection—the white masculine hero saving the feminized brown man from other brown men.

Falk's evasiveness when it comes to pointing out the numbing ghastliness of colonialism comes to the fore as the Phantom continues to explain to his wife that Kit and Caribo never made it to the golden city which they believed to be Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec Empire. With the resolution to the adventure being that the two friends eventually make an even greater discovery—Walker's Table, a mesa with a cave on top of it, becoming the Phantom dynasty's oldest hideout in North America—the script also confirms the presence of gold in Tenochtitlan ("There was much gold there!") with an acknowledgment of who discovered it instead ("Cortez would find it 25 years later"). In the Phantom's narration, Cortés was the one who "found" the gold and therefore beat his ancestor, as well as any other European, to the prize (Fig. 2.12).

The pursuit and hunt for gold on foreign soil are thereby presented as a treasure hunt, a big game played by white Europeans on a foreign

"KIT AND CARIBO WOULD NEVER FIND TENOCHTITLAN THE ISLAND CITY OF MEXICO."
"THERE WAS MUCH GOLD THERE! CORTEZ WOULD FIND IT 25 YEARS LATER."
THEY'D FOUND SOMETHING MORE AMAZING THAN ANY GOLDEN CITY — BUT THEY DIDN'T KNOW IT-- AMERICA!
!

Fig. 2.12 Phantom explains to his wife that Cortés eventually found the gold that Walker and Caribo searched for in vain (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

continent reduced to a game board, determined by which one of the competing actors is first to discover the hidden fortune. In shying away from a language that with accuracy captures the murders, rapes, plundering and enslavement enacted on behalf of the gold-smitten *conquistadors*—or even addresses the fact that someone, a whole civilization to be more concrete, had already discovered and mined the gold—there is little to suggest that the Phantom, like his ancestor, regards the land of the Aztecs to be any different from Cortés, or as David Livingstone viewed Sigunga, as Western civilizations traditionally view "primitive" land and cultures—as treasure troves, as the observers' rightful possession (Torgovnick 1990).

The point here is not to make a Hernán Cortés of Lee Falk, or to suggest that the latter was unapologetic to the violence enacted by the former, but to show that Walker, in his desired action to discover gold on a foreign continent, replicates the actions of colonialism without necessarily approving of colonialism itself. A similar verdict has been returned against Falk. In his analysis of *The Phantom*, Friese (1999) diagnoses Falk as someone in love with colonial fiction, not colonies. While this may explain the appropriation of the frequent narrative patterns in colonial literature laid bare in this chapter—including the social and racial boundaries drawn between Westerners and non-Westerners in today's Africa and Latin America—my task here has also been to uncover the Phantom's ambivalent relationship to colonialism.

If this episode encapsulates the first ancestor of the family line in the colonial enterprise through his active participation in the subsequent colonization of the Americas, a similar connection can be made, relating back to Said's (1994) thesis on many Western literary works being dependent on colonialism for plot reversals and the lifestyle choices of their characters, on how the dynasty ended up in Bangalla. Even if, as previously mentioned, there is little to link the Walker dynasty to the slave trade, the connection to colonialism is explicitly made. At the time the Walkers sail off, England sought trading posts, predominately in Africa, to support its domestic economy, which means that empire building is central to the reasons why the Walkers are on a merchant ship off the African coast in the first place before succumbing to the pirate attack that initiates the Phantom dynasty. In short, not only is the Phantom dynasty more or less the same age as colonialism, without it the dynasty would not exist.

Lost in Translation

A far more important reason for invoking the tale of the Walker dynasty's early footprints on the American continent is the early indication of the radical alterations that the Swedish bullpen knows as Team Fantomen would make to the universe of the Ghost Who Walks, as this episode appeared in the Swedish *The Phantom* comic book roughly a year after its publication in the United States. The Italian expression *Tradutore, traditore* ("Translator, traitor"), targeting the implication of infidelity that is often associated with the task of translating, seems apt here as readers in Sweden are offered a completely different perspective on colonialism. Instead of the Phantom's disappointment that Cortés tracked down the gold before his ancestor, the same caption in the Swedish version reads completely differently: "Cortez plundered the city 25 years later… and in a certain sense it was fortunate that Kit wasn't involved in that story…" In stark contrast to Falk's representation, this passage concentrates on the *conquistador's* brutality and inserts a statement of relief that the Walker dynasty had no part in the looting of Tenochtitlan (Figs. 2.13 and 2.14).

The most striking example of editing creativity and liberty on behalf of Team Fantomen in the same adventure is nonetheless reserved for the reactions to Columbus' landfall in the Americas and the subsequent annexation of the land in the name of the Spanish court. The following panel shows the Phantom and his wife, Diana, conversing. The only function of the panel is to link the present to the fifteenth century in which the plot is otherwise played out. In Falk's original, Diana reacts to the Phantom's story by expressing her surprising delight ("This is fantastic! Your ancestor – father of the first Phantom – sailed with Columbus?"). Meanwhile, the mask-wearing narrator himself remains stone faced. In the Swedish comic book, Diana has other opinions about this: "Typical, right? In those days Europeans – that is, white people – believed that they had the legal right to confiscate the countries of people of color!" The Phantom shares her conviction and adds that these historical events still affect the development of regions once under colonial rule: "Yes, Diana! It was pure theft – and that is why we have so many problems in the Third World today…" (Figs. 2.15 and 2.16).

In a 1971 essay, Bo Lundin classifies these alterations to the speech bubbles in Falk's script as a "political editing to the left" which at the same time shows the possibility to transform the tone of an adventure without major encroachments on and compromises to the main plot (Lundin

Fig. 2.13 Falk/Barry's original: "There was much gold there! Cortéz would find it 25 years later" (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

1971, 108). Readers of the Swedish comic book get to witness a conversation that uncovers the couple's views on the ruthlessness of colonialism, in addition to the Phantom linking the past to present political issues in the so-called Third World. For the Phantom, the arrival of Columbus in the Americas inflicted a colonial wound that has yet to heal. Lundin closes his argument by posing the rhetorical question of whether the Swedish creators will have the Phantom battling as a guerrilla leader before the end of the decade. As will be seen in the next chapters—especially in Chapter 4—it can be assumed that not even Lundin himself could ever imagine how close to the truth he would be.

Fig. 2.14 Swedish version: "Cortez plundered the city 25 years later… and in a certain sense it was fortunate that Kit wasn't involved in that story…" (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

Fig. 2.15 Falk/Barry's original: Diana expresses her amazement at her husband's ancestor's presence on Columbus' ship (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

TYPISKT, VA? PÅ DEN TIDEN TRODDE EUROPÉERNA - DOM VITA ALLTSÅ - ATT DOM HADE LAGLIG RÄTT ATT LÄGGA BESLAG PÅ DOM FÄRGADE FOLKENS LÄNDER!
JA, DIANA! DET VAR REN STÖLD - OCH DET ÄR DÄRFÖR VI HAR STORA PROBLEM I U-LÄNDERNA IDAG...

Fig. 2.16 Swedish version: Diana lashes out against the consequences of European colonialism (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

Notes

1. In many versions of *The Phantom*, including the Scandinavian comic books, the country is called "Bengali" which was the name Lee Falk used in the early decades, when the country was placed closer to India. As Bengali was confirmed as being in Africa during the 1960s, Falk renamed the country Bangalla in the 1970s. The first reference to Bengali's African location came in 1962, the name was changed to Bangalla in 1973 and the same time the capital was changed from Morristown to Mawitaan (Patrick 2017). In the Swedish books, the country remains Bengali and the capital Morristown.
2. Lee Falk Memorial Bengali Explorers Club, *Lee Falk*, 78.
3. The Mysterious Ambassador (1962–1963) script: Lee Falk; art: Sy Barry.
4. Lee Falk Memorial Bengali Explorers Club. Scandinavian Chapter, *Fantomen: Från lila vålnad till blågul hjälte* (Stockholm: GML-förlag, 2010), 78–79.
5. Ibid., 223.
6. The Inexorables (1942–1943) script: Lee Falk; art: Ray Moore & Wilson McCoy.
7. The Human Torch #12 (1943) cover: Alex Schomburg.
8. These examples of anti-Japanese slurs are from the following comic books: *Captain America* #6 (1941) script: Joe Simon & Jack Kirby; art: Joe Simon & Jack Kirby; *Wonder Woman* #19 (1946) script: Joye Murchison; art: Harry G. Peter; *All Star Comics* #12 (1942) script: Gardener Fox; art: Jack Burnley, Sheldon Moldoff, Cliff Young, Ben Flinton, Bernard Klein, Stan Aschmeier & Bernard Baily.
9. Before settling on Mawitaan, Falk also called Bangalla's capital Movitaan, Mowitaan and Mowiton during the 1960s. In the Team Fantomen stories, however, the name of the capital of the country remains Morristown.
10. The First Phantom (1975) script: Lee Falk; art: Sy Barry.
11. Hergé, *Le secret de la licorne*.
12. Hergé, *Le trésor de Rackham le rouge*.
13. Walker's Table (1969) script: Lee Falk; art: Sy Barry.

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CHAPTER 3

International Solidarity and Swedish Foreign Policy

Abstract This chapter shows that Team Fantomen's effects on the Phantom's universe were immediate. It specifically targets the hero's political responses and actions to those conflicts with which he is confronted. The chapter addresses the ways in which contemporary concerns regarding violations of human rights, neocolonial governing through the former colonies' continuous economic dependency on the metropolitan centers, and the lack of literacy among black workers were all woven into the comic. What these themes all have in common is that they were an integral part of Swedish foreign policy and aid at the time.

Keywords The Phantom · Team Fantomen · Dependency theory · Swedish exceptionalism · Foreign aid · International solidarity

Fredric Wertham's 1954 *Seduction of the Innocent* has been referred to as the "*Mein Kampf* of comics" due to its full-on attack on the comic medium (Sabin 1993). Wertham, inspired by Theodor Adorno's critique of "mass culture" as a vehicle of capitalism, targets descriptions of an explicit sexual and violent nature found in comics of the period. Wertham goes as far as to assert that the practice of reading comics leads to juvenile delinquency. According to several comics scholars (e.g., Barker 1989; McAllister et al. 2001), the book is seen as the catalyst for an anti-comics

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campaign that went on to handcuff comic book production both economically and culturally in the United States for decades, leading to a moral panic over the content of comics and eventually resulting in the establishment of the self-policing Comics Code Authority for the industry. From now on, comics in the United States had to adhere to imposed standards regarding the nature of the violence depicted (injuries to the eye were banned), representations of government officials and public institutions (policemen, judges and their institutions had to be portrayed in such a way that disrespect for their established authority was not encouraged) and the choice of keywords in titles (terms such as "terror" were no longer allowed) (Wright 2001).

Wertham would soon have international followers. One of them was the Swedish child psychologist Nils Bejerot. In his *Barn, serier, samhälle* (*Children, Comics, Society*) published in 1954, Bejerot advances the argument that comics are, to a great extent, violent, misogynistic and racist reading material that dulled young minds. In the case of *The Phantom*, Bejerot goes as far as to suggest that the masked hero embodies the kind of lynch mentality historically associated with the Ku Klux Klan (ironically, and possibly a subconscious effort on behalf of Team Fantomen, Ku Klux Klan is one of the organizations against which the Phantom will go on to fight in the Swedish adventures).

Bejerot was not alone. Although his debate book did not have the same impact in terms of the creation of a code to regulate the content of comic book as in the case of Wertham and the United States, public concern in Sweden regarding the potential harmful effects of comics on children did not go away. In autumn 1969, fifteen years after Bejerot's book, debates on pejorative racial themes and imagery in *The Phantom* re-emerged, this time on the pages of the tabloid newspaper *Göteborgs-Tidningen* and the journal *Fönstret*. Critics argued that the comic contained colonialist stereotypes of natives unable to rule and protect themselves without the guiding hand—or, in this particular case, fists—of a white man. For the publisher, Semic Press, the situation was bittersweet. Although it was far from enjoyable to work on a comic book that was publicly deemed to be racist, as Team Fantomen writer Magnus Knutsson later admitted, the reason why the content of *The Phantom* was up for public scrutiny in the mainstream media in the first place could also be related to the steadily increasing popularity of the character. Both the criticism of the content in *The Phantom* and growing sales figures would play their parts in the decision to produce adventures from Stockholm.

Even if the first Swedish contribution to the Phantom universe, "Skatten i dödskallategrottan" (*The Treasure in the Skull Cave*), appeared as early as *Fantomen* 8/1963,[1] the Swedish *The Phantom* comic book consisted during the 1960s almost entirely of edited versions of Lee Falk's newspaper dailies and Sunday strips, and edited translations of Italian storylines from publisher Edizioni Fratelli Spada. The comic's gradual growth in sales—from 130,000 copies sold in 1966 to 150,000 the year after—allowed for a doubling of the publishing rate from a monthly to fortnightly run. "I make six to eight episodes per year," Falk (2011, 225) said of the decision to outsource part of the production, "and they [Team Fantomen] needed 26 episodes per year and hence asked for permission to produce their own ones." With a yearly shortfall of roughly twenty stories, in combination with the Italian adventures which, in the opinion of Ulf Granberg, editor-in-chief of the Swedish *Phantom*, were of substandard quality, regular licensed production of in-house scripts was seen as the only way to meet the growing demand and allow publishing to be increased.

The decision to produce authorized adventures for the Swedish *The Phantom* also allowed for an output in line with the sensibilities of the new decade. In more practical terms, this meant, to use Magnus Knutsson's (2003, 96–97) words, a "modernization of the storyline," as they sought to weave "realism" and "social relevance" into the adventures, in the process attempting to counter the criticism of racism in the comic. Not limited to Sweden, Ramzi Fawaz (2011), in his study of ideology in Marvel's the X-Men, asserts that "relevance" became a popular buzzword in the American comics industry in the wake of 1968, denoting a shift in content from oblique narrative metaphors and pure fantasy toward direct representations of racism and sexism, urban decay and political corruption. The same goes for the leading characters of *The Phantom*. The Ghost Who Walks himself was subjected to an extreme makeover—not in terms of physicality, but of political orientation. Speaking about editorial decisions retrospectively, Granberg (2003, 2) describes the 1970s as the "golden age" for the masked hero, a decade when Team Fantomen, in his account, instilled in the Ghost Who Walks "new humanistic characteristics and a social consciousness."

The infrastructure was put in place to reinvent the Phantom for a Swedish audience. The first to arrive was Janne Lundström, co-founder of the Swedish Comics Association in 1968, who had started his career on *The Phantom* editing, rewriting and sometimes even commissioning

new artwork to adapt the Fratelli Spada production for use in Swedish comic books. Frustrated with the general quality of the adventures—they had, Magnus Knutsson summarizes, "very good art but terrible scripts"—Lundström began writing his own original stories, soon being joined by Knutsson. Meanwhile, Lundström and Knutsson shared writing duties, and the Catalan Jaime Vallvé and the Turk Özkan Eralp were hired as artists. Further changes to the comic were undertaken by Ulf Granberg, who was appointed editor-in-chief in 1972: Elaborate editorial pages, regular correspondence with readers on dedicated member pages and full credits for authorship began to appear. But these additions to the comic book were mild in comparison with the renewal of the universe in which the hero operates.

Firstly, the recent changes made by Falk regarding Bangalla's spot on the world map and its political statues as an independent former British colony enabled the Swedish writers to add a layer of historical realism to the storyline. Parallel to the founding of Team Fantomen, public engagement with the plight of blacks in southern Africa had gone so far that these countries had become household names in Sweden, and behind the word was the image of people struggling for racial equality and independence from their white overlords (Gleijeses 2005; Sellström 2002). Hence, the scriptwriters of Team Fantomen were able to transform the Phantom's exotic location in a jungle into a narrative advantage, enabling them to speak directly about structural injustices in Africa (Aman 2016). And there was no greater injustice, Magnus Knutsson (2003) explains in an account of his time with Team Fantomen during the 1970s, than the ways in which a white ruling class oppressed the black population.

A prominent example of this political turn is episode 16/1971, "Plantagens hemlighet" (*The Secret of the Plantation*).[2] Passing through a flourishing valley, the Phantom wonders aloud why this part of the country has escaped governmental interference ("The large land reform that was conducted after Bangalla's independence doesn't include the Stevens Plantation. Very strange…") before being interrupted by the sound of blazing guns. Sprinting toward the gunfire, the Phantom discovers a dozen uniformed white guards beating an elderly black man, accusing him of trespassing on private property. After the Phantom rescues him, the old man, Mbebo, gives him a history lesson in return ("Our people lived here and cultivated the land in the Stevens' valley long before the whites conquered Bangalla. Then the soldiers came and took the land and our people became slaves under the Stevens family"). Continuing his story,

"DE VITA STIFTADE LAGAR SOM TVINGADE OSS ATT ARBETA UTAN BETALNING. TVÅNGS-KOMMENDERING AV ARBETSLÖSA KALLADE DOM DET. OM VI SADE EMOT, DÅ VEN PISKAN — PÅ BÅDE MÄN OCH KVINNOR."
AAAAA!!
MEN SÅ KOM BENGALIS FRIGÖRELSE OCH PRESIDENT LUAGAS STORA JORDREFORM — MEN TYVÄRR, DEN INFÖRDES ALDRIG PÅ STEVENS-PLANTAGEN!
FORTSÄTT, MBEBO!

Fig. 3.1 Mbebo teaches the Phantom about racial exploitation in Bangalla prior to the country gained independence (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

Mbebo describes how Bangalla's independence and the land reform of President Lamanda Luaga had a profound impact across the nation but did not include the Stevens' valley. This, Mbebo explains, is due to the owners' influential status: "With the help of money and power they are able to oppose Bangalla's new government."

As Mbebo educates the Phantom on a history of oppression, the panels show images of slaves performing the tedious work in the fields as well as offering glimpses into what happened to anyone who dared to defy the overlords, as a woman in chains screams out her pain while being whipped by a guard. In explaining the ways in which colonialism changed the relations of production ("The white instilled laws that forced us to work without payment") with a focus on racial exploitation ("If we spoke back, we got whipped – both men and women"), the panels offer a window into how race classification and control of labor complemented each other, resulting in the reduction of colonized people to unpaid labor forces at the service of white owners (Hardt and Negri 2000) (Fig. 3.1).

As well as explaining the continuous dominance of the white colonial bourgeoisie in postcolonial African states, the comic introduces the Phantom to a new enemy. The Stevens family played a major role in the adventures of Team Fantomen during the 1970s, being one of the few recurring villains in the Phantom's universe. Their introduction was pivotal to grappling with the political commitment of the Swedish scriptwriters. According to Richard Reynolds (1992), the characteristics, backgrounds and desires of foes in a given period are more important to the political

and cultural meaning of the story arc than the actual hero, as the villains present the threats against which the hero needs to react. As part of the Phantom's updated rogues gallery, the Stevens family serves as a representation of the colonial extraction of Africa in terms of the decisive large-scale appropriation of land for European settlers, a strategy that not only provided European investors and settlers with secure control of land but also, as demonstrated by Mbebo in this story, obliged Africans to sell their labor to the white landowners (Palmer and Parsons 1977). In contrast to other famous comic book nemeses such Batman's the Joker or Captain America's Red Skull, the Stevens family does not aim to create mayhem. Instead, they operate in the shadows, relying on wealth and political influence to sustain their privileged position of power while regularly exploiting the country's black population. More importantly to the storyline, their presence pinpoints the unfinished business of decolonization, that is, post-independence disillusion and new performances of tyranny continuously based on a hierarchy of status and social inequality.

Mbebo's description of how privileges inherited from colonial times—and the violence enforced to gain them—continues to live on sparks the Ghost Who Walks. Enraged, he confronts the Minister of Agriculture who admits that the government is afraid to offend the Stevens family, as "they own the copper company and have important foreign business relations that can stop our exports." The Minister pauses before adding that this export is fundamental to the country's survival: "without it Bangalla can't exist as a free nation." Dressed as Mr. Walker, his alias when leaving the jungle, wearing his customary sunglasses, hat and trench coat, the Phantom instructs the Minister that Bangalla is going to buy back the land from the Stevens family. Unaware of the Phantom's vast treasure trove in the back of his Skull Cave, the Minister finds himself in a state of shock as the mysterious stranger informs him that the necessary financial means will be delivered to his office. "The plantation should be owned collectively," the Phantom affirms, "by the former slaves." Several pages and violent confrontations later, the landlord agrees to sell the plantation back to Bangalla for a fraction of its value (Fig. 3.2).

The storyline draws its rhetorical strength from its eschewal of a gradual unfolding of events, instead moving straight to its predetermined conclusion. The reader is from the outset placed in the position of someone who shares the hero's values. In this particular case, the question is never whether the Phantom—and by extension we the readers—should sympathize with the black slaves or the white landlords, with African labor

SE TILL ATT STEVENS ÄR HÄR DÅ!
PLANTAGEN SKALL ÄGAS GEMENSAMT, AV DOM FORNA LIVEGNA!
M-MEN ... ÅH, HAN ÄR BORTA! — RINGEN, DÖDSKALLEMÄRKET! DET VAR ALLTSÅ HAN!

Fig. 3.2 The Phantom declares to the Minister of Agriculture that the plantation should be owned collectively by the former slaves (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

or European capital, with the colonized or the colonizers. The Phantom, like the implied reader, starts the story as a possessor of the "right" values and is throughout fighting in their name. Susan Suleiman (1993, 143), in her study of the ideological novel, refers to this strategy as "persuasion by cooperation": The reader and the hero find themselves structurally—that is, necessarily—from the start on the "right" side of the dividing line between the binaries of "good" and "evil." In drawing a direct connection between the villain of the story, the landowning Stevens family, and the practice of reducing human lives to commodity and cargo, the storyline ensures that only a "perverse" reader would favor a triumph of the villain over the hero (Suleiman 1993).

As is made abundantly clear by the story arc, the "triumph" of the hero in this context implies that ownership of the land is transferred back to the people who cultivated it before European presence; the land should be, as verbalized by the Phantom, owned collectively by the former slaves. By inscribing the plot into a historical context which feeds directly into a contemporary public debate on decolonization which was as lively in Sweden (e.g., Sellström 1999) as elsewhere in Europe (e.g., Chamberlain 1999) at the time of its publication, the comic also encourages the reader's "referential illusions," to borrow from Roland Barthes (1973), by trying to break down the barrier between fiction and life. In a manner akin to the Phantom's faith in the sovereign state as the most effective way to bring about social justice, the Swedish government, in foreign policies that became gradually more ideologically colored during the 1970s

(Lödén 1999), advocated its own welfare state as a model for other countries, especially those in the Third World, to emulate (Nilsson 1991).

That the political climate in Sweden impacted the plots of *The Phantom* is confirmed by the editor of the comic, who regularly corresponded with readers in special members pages. Issue 3/1975 contains a letter from a reader describing himself as a devoted adult fan who praises the magazine for its "ethical stance" as *The Phantom* has "adapted to the fact that white, Western values have shown themselves to be fragile and doomed." In his response to the letter, editor Granberg adds that *The Phantom*'s ability to keep up with the times is a characteristic "that emerges with particular salience in the episodes that we [Team Fantomen] produce ourselves, both in writing and drawing." As a concluding remark, Granberg informs his correspondent that the values instilled in the Phantom "become in any case quite Swedish in this originally American series." And to be "Swedish" implied at this point in time to sympathize with the right to self-determination of the former colonies. At least according to future Prime Minister Olof Palme. Addressing this question in a widely discussed article from 1967, Palme (2006, 51) went so far as to suggest that a different stance would be impossible as "the task is as far as possible to seek to liberate people from the dictatorship of social and economic relations." And as will be further discussed in the upcoming chapter, the Social Democratic government went as far as to providing generous financial aid to liberation movements advocating armed struggle against their white rulers (Gleijeses 2005; cf. Aman 2018). In short, the Phantom's position on ethics overlaps with that of Sweden's foreign policy.

However, the above does not imply that the Swedish government's expressed solidarity with liberation movements in the so-called Third World was an implicit support for those acts of violence that postcolonial philosopher Frantz Fanon (1966) famously deemed inescapable in the process of decolonization. On the contrary, the Social Democratic Party, in general, and Palme, in particular, were strong advocates of democratic reformism as a cautious path toward development and independence in former colonies (Fredriksson 2006). In this storyline, the Phantom's mind-set is no different (nevertheless, he will soon change his mind as is addressed in the next chapter). When he seeks a resolution to the quarrel with the Stevens family, although he wishes to transform private property into a public asset, confiscation or other forms of force are never explored. While Mbebo's story makes it clear that the occupation of land in Africa was a form of robbery ("they took the land"), the Phantom

Fig. 3.3 The Phantom forces Minister Stevens to sell the plantation to the state of Bangalla (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

never disputes the legality of private property—not even in this particular case where the accumulated wealth of the villains can be directly traced to the conquering of land and the countless hours extracted from forced labor (Fig. 3.3).

In his seminal essay on Superman, Umberto Eco (1972) criticizes the Man of Steel for being a protector of capitalism as he only defeats villains that attempt to seize private property, without ever engaging in political or social struggles. Sharing both commonalities and differences with such an assessment of Superman's exploits, the Phantom embeds himself in political and social conflicts, firmly positioned on the workers', and their enslaved ancestors', side in the conflict, while never disputing capitalism as an economic system by arguing in favor of the abolishment of individual ownership. In short, respect for the legality of private property is privileged over the colonial wound; democratic reformism is favored over state confiscation of private property. A possible reason for this is the dominance of the Social Democratic Party and its vocal anticommunism during the Cold War (Linderborg 2001), which at the same time meant that there were plausible marketing reasons for the Phantom not to allude to ideological cornerstones of the Soviet Union in critiques of extremist corporate capitalism and imperialist practices. Instead, the triumph of the Phantom—and by extension the reader—comes through his ability, within the bounds of the law, to make the Stevens family dramatically drop their asking price for the land their ancestors once acquired as part of colonial expansion.

Against Capital, Toward Socialism

The direct impact of the New Left on the Phantom's political doctrine comes to the fore in another issue, "Handelskriget" (*The Trade War*) 3/1973,[3] which is a fictional foray into a postcolonial debate on debt and dependency. The arc begins with a peasant, Toro, informing his co-workers that he needs to buy a new spade as a thought bubble give away his suspicion that they are being duped ("I don't like the Whites in the store. Everything is more expensive every time one goes there") before admitting the reason for his lack of certainty ("I wish that I knew how to read and count"). Far from any urban areas, there is only one wholesale store in the entire region, which means that the unscrupulous white owner can raise the prices on the commodities to unaffordable levels (Fig. 3.4).

In order to purchase the necessary equipment to perform their labor, the black worker sees no other option than to accept the proposed offer to hand over a part of the harvest as compensation. The panel shows a puzzled Toro struggling with the mathematics ("Trying in vain to get an idea of what tenths, fifths and percentages mean…") before signing the debenture with the owner laughing behind his back ("The idiot doesn't know that he has already transferred the rights to twelve tenths of his harvest to us"). When armed men arrive at the plantation demanding the harvest, the peasants realize that they have been tricked and are up to their ears in liabilities. In this moment of clarity, the workers start planning a violent revenge in order to take back what they have worked for.

JA! FÖRLÅT, HUR KUNDE JAG GLÖMMA DET... NÅJA, EN PROCENT AV SKÖRDEN ÄR JU ÖVERKOMLIGT! · ELLER HUR, TORO?
OCH SPADEN ÄR BLANK OCH FIN! DET ÄR BARA ATT SÄTTA EN KRUMELUR PÅ SKULD-SEDELN!
PROCENT?
TORO FÖRSÖKER FÖRGÄVES PÅ EN UPPFATTNING OM VAD TIONDELAR, FEMTONDELAR OCH PROCENT INNEBÄR...

Fig. 3.4 Toro being duped by the white store owners, taking advantage of the fact that Toro can't read or count (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

Before a war breaks out, the Phantom arrives on the scene where he is briefed about the situation by the enraged workforce ("We'll never get out of debt!"). What is interesting in this episode is not the typical action-packed way in which the Phantom goes about resolving the conflict with the villains, but the measures he takes to ensure that a similar situation will not arise again. Calling upon his friend, Trader Joe, to help the workers set up their own store, the Phantom informs them that "He [Trader Joe] will also teach you what is meant by co-operative society, co-ownership and profit distribution!". After being taught the ideas underpinning a co-operative society over supper ("So we're all co-owners and the profit is spent on the purchase of new goods?"), the caption states that it does not take long before the workers' co-owned store blossoms (Fig. 3.5).

The story reads allegorically: The comic hit newsstands around Sweden at a time when a paradigm shift had occurred in the understanding of the causes of underdevelopment. Neoclassical economic theories of economic growth, usually called "trickle-down" economics, which had dominated the postwar discussion of development, were repudiated by neo-Marxist-inspired theories of "dependency." Crudely put, the recipe for development was no longer necessarily based on a simplified view of all nations needing to emulate the growth patterns historically followed by the richest countries (Wallerstein 1974). Instead, dependency theorists emphasize a causal connection between colonialism and underdevelopment. In possibly the most influential work of this school of thought, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, leading proponent Walter Rodney (1972) argues

MINA VÄNNER, DET HÄR ÄR HANDLAR-JOE, SOM HAR SIN HANDELSSTATION LÄNGT IN I DJUNGELN
HAN HAR VAROR ÄT ER — SOM NI ALLA ÄGER! DOM ÄR BETALDA! JOE SKA HJÄLPA ER ATT SÄTTA UPP ER EGEN HANDELSBOD!
HAN KOMMER OCKSÅ ATT SÄTTA ER IN I VAD SOM MENAS MED KOOPERATION, DELÄGARSKAP OCH VINSTFÖRDELNING!
NU LASTAR VI AV BILEN!

Fig. 3.5 The Phantom introduces Trader Joe and informs the peasants that the old merchant will teach them the logics of a co-operative society and profit distribution (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

that underdevelopment is the direct consequence of Africa's position as a cornerstone of the global capitalist system under colonialism, where the economic surplus that the continent produced was systematically exported to enrich the imperial centers. Hence, the development of Europe can be viewed as part of the same dialectical processes that underdeveloped Africa. Consequently, development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin—developed nations are actively underdeveloping Third World countries as a result of the systems of interaction between them. In addition to gaining widespread recognition in academic circles, these ideas acquired such influence that, in the case of Sweden, they were employed as an explanatory model for underdevelopment in Africa in school textbooks (Palmberg 1987).

Dependency theory frames the subplot of this *Phantom* adventure; the story offers a pedagogical illustration of dependency as a continuation of colonialism by demonstrating the contemporary roles of many former colonies within the capitalist system as agrarian economies specializing in exports in return for the importation of manufactured goods from the developed industrial world (Hobsbawm 2011). In a scheme where the main characters of the story come to embody their respective positions in the capitalist system, the black laborers (representing the underdeveloped world) find themselves in a position where they have no other alternative than to consume overpriced tools and instruments supplied by the white merchants (representing the developed world). The store itself stands in for the world market, illustrating the hierarchical relationship between "core" and "periphery," Europe and Africa, industrialists and agrarians, in which the peasants have no other means to pay than with their harvest, or indebting themselves through credit. Furthermore, what the plot reveals is that political decolonization by itself hardly changed the economic relations between many postcolonial states and their former metropolitan countries. Although considered as nominally sovereign states, they continue to be part of an imperial economy subordinated to a foreign power, reduced to supplying raw materials.

For these very reasons, proponents of dependency theory were stern critics of development aid—especially those measures focusing on export credit guarantees which most European nations, including Sweden, offered targeted countries—suggesting that they veiled imperial ambitions in order to maintain former colonies in a state of dependency. In the case of Sweden, the impact of dependency theory, according to Bertil Odén (2013), went so far as to alter the development aid policy: Instead of

the focus on modernization through economic growth, investments and trade that had dominated the first proposition from 1962 (1962:100), the next one in 1968 (1968:101) outlined a new goal of contributing to the economic independence of those countries that had recently gained their political liberation.

Secondly, the lack of literacy among the workers makes the case for the centrality of education to Swedish foreign aid during the 1970s. The objectives for Swedish development cooperation, formulated in 1962, state that the aim is to improve the living standards of poor people around the globe. This gave rise to a particular focus on supporting education in sub-Saharan Africa through literacy campaigns, aid to the printing and distribution of textbooks, and the construction of schools in the countryside (Linde 2000). Just as the Phantom ensures that the adult peasants receive basic training in reading and counting, a substantial part of Swedish development aid targeted mature learners with a particular focus on literacy. In Tanzania alone, over 50 folk high schools were set up with economic as well as educational and consultative support from Sweden (Dahlstedt and Nordvall 2011).[4] Seen from this perspective, the story legitimizes Swedish foreign aid by pointing out its relevance: The implied reader is assured that these educational efforts would have prevented the African peasants from being stripped of their hard-earned harvest and acquiring a heap of debt at the hands of deceitful exploiters—or will do so in the future.

Returning to the Phantom, the Ghost Who Walks does not speak up about what he considers to be "right" or "wrong" in a given situation, but shows it through his actions, actions that in turn validate the political message the narrative seeks to convey. His formula for addressing the threat posed by the white merchant is a textbook example of the intended outcomes of the highly profiled joint Nordic development aid projects launched in the late 1960s to promote the construction of co-operatives in targeted parts of Africa (Paaskesen 2010). In Sweden, the co-operative ideology was an essential part of the dominant national narrative that democracy and the welfare state had been created through a compromise between workers and peasants organizing themselves through state-independent co-operatives (Millbourn 2008). After the Phantom has taught the peasants to club together to protect themselves and their economic interests, the storyline addresses the fact that co-operatives were perceived as a threat to capitalism, as they promote another economic system. Just as the private sector in Sweden sought to

put consumer co-operatives out of business through boycotts and price reductions (Millbourn 2008), the white merchants drop their prices in order to lure the peasants back to their store. An enraged Trader Joe rebukes the peasants, explaining ferociously that this is merely a dirty business trick to bankrupt their co-operative store before raising the prices again. The last panel of the story shows smiling villagers, having finally listened to Trader Joe's advice, inside their own co-operative store full of food and equipment (Fig. 3.6).

Although done with the best of intentions, the Phantom's actions in the name of solidarity are not immune to the criticism that Gayatri Spivak (2008) directs toward development aid programs in the Third World. Despite the change in politics from the American version, the Phantom rekindles a colonialist position—a position with clear resemblance to the white savior complex discussed in Chapter 2—as he remains a guardian and teacher of the locals whose interests and needs he dictates in order to direct their actions toward an appropriate end. As seen in the story above, the Phantom assumes that the locals do not have the expertise and ability to develop models that allow them to fight the monopoly of the white merchants without his help. Help which, according to Spivak (2008, 15), often serves as a cover for the social Darwinism implicit in "development," framed as "the burden of the fittest" as the responsibility to educate the natives rests on the Phantom's broad shoulders. In line with colonialist representations, the Phantom is the superior helper of

Fig. 3.6 The co-operative store blossoms again after all peasants have realized that they need to jointly take responsibility for the store (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

the passive and inadequate natives whose unreliability almost destroys the system that the masked hero puts in place to protect them: Their lack of understanding of a co-operative in combination with their short-sighted and unpredictable consumption patterns nearly bankrupt the store they have been given to own collectively.

Such colonial echoes in Sweden's championing of global solidarity are not limited to *The Phantom*: They have been uncovered in various foreign aid activities (Eriksson Baaz 2002), including the exportation of study circles (Wallin 2000), popular adult education (Dahlstedt and Nordvall 2011) and co-operatives (Paaskesen 2010). Offering a parallel to *The Phantom* comics, these studies uncover a larger contradictory discourse in which there is, on the one hand, a strong anticolonial impulse inherent in the efforts of Swedish foreign aid to break with the colonial heritage; on the other hand, colonialist representations are prevalent in the construction of differences and a hierarchical organization of invoked subjects. In all the studies listed above, it is the Swedes, like the Phantom, who, albeit benevolently, sustain the privilege and power of possessing the knowledge that people in different parts of Africa require to challenge the structures of oppression and inequality under which they are living. Regardless of intent, this scholarship reveals that it is the Swedes who essentially define the conditions and set the framework for success and failure, based on specific "Swedish" interpretations of how to run a study circle, a folk high school or, as in the case of the Phantom, a co-operative.

Colonial Rule, Swedish Exceptionalism

What distinguishes *The Phantom* from the most prominent example of New Left ideology in superhero comics of the period, Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams' praised run on *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* from 1970 to 1972, is that the hero in the former never undergoes growth. In the latter, Green Lantern is portrayed as having a naïve faith in corporatist America and the possibilities for justice under capitalism. Accompanying Green Arrow on a trip around the United States becomes an eye-opening experience for Green Lantern as he is confronted with social, racial and economic injustices of which he was previously unaware. Back home again, Green Lantern's political compass points in another direction.

The Phantom, on the other hand, stands firm in his beliefs. In contrast to Green Lantern and by extension his American readership, the Ghost

Who Walks does not need any additional lectures on politics; his understanding of ethics and inequalities are unwavering—which, in turn, suggests that "we," the Swedish readers, do not need to be reminded about what is morally "correct" and humanitarian either. A possible explanation for these ideological differences is that at the time of writing, the United States was suffering from what Costello (2009, 87) refers to as "an erosion of national identity consensus." After years of unifying against an external enemy—reflected in comics from Captain America punching Adolf Hitler to Iron Man's fight against Soviet spies—the tumultuous events of 1968, sparked by the war in Vietnam and the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, played a part in what Bruce Schulman (2001) refers to as the undoing of the postwar consensus leading to the political fragmentation of the 1970s.

By contrast, ideological consensus remained potent in Sweden. Although several scholars relate this to the dominance of the Social Democratic Party and their ability to formulate foreign aid policies accordingly (Linderborg 2001; Lödén 1999), the consistency in foreign policy is preeminently illustrated by the fact that the change of government to a conservative coalition (1976–1982) did not produce any significant alterations (Odén 2013). In order to understand this phenomenon, other academic commentators move away from party politics to speak more broadly about a discourse of "Swedish exceptionalism" (Habel 2012; Hübinette and Lundström 2011; Schierup and Ålund 2011). Sweden, according to these scholars, presents itself as a radical utopia for equality and equity, allegedly less affected by postcolonial relations than other nations, by virtue of its welfare politics, and its democratic and egalitarian principles (Habel 2012). Although Sweden admittedly took an active part in the imperial enterprise through, for instance, the possession of the slave fortress Carolusborg in Cabo Corso (modern-day Ghana) and the Caribbean island Saint Barthélemy (Aman 2016), the relative brevity of these colonial adventures has become, paradoxically, an important resource in the branding of Sweden as a humanitarian role model (Jonsson 2009). Katarina Schough (2008) suggests that the limited scope of this involvement has awarded Sweden a double moral advantage: As a participant in the colonial project, the Swede is self-evidently superior to the natives, while also morally superior to the colonizer whose expansive empires acquired through widespread violence they can easily condemn. This can be said to have added to an image of Swedish identity as tolerant, colorblind and non-racist (Bjereld and Demker 1995),

while also adding credibility as Sweden was beginning to position itself as a leading anticolonial voice. All of these factors, as Allan Pred (2000, 6) contends, contributed to successfully launching Sweden "as the world's capital of good intentions and civilized behavior towards others."

The above offers a possible reason why the Phantom comes across as untouched by colonial and postcolonial social dynamics. Although he is a descendant of an English aristocratic family residing in a former British colony, the national "adoption" of the Phantom as part of Sweden's self-image whitewashes both the character and his family line which runs parallel to the rule of the British Empire. This holds particularly true in issue 26/1970, "Vattenprovet" (*The Water Test*),[5] when a former British general returns to Bangalla in the autumn of his life. During a car ride out of the capital, Mawitaan, the officer, General Williams, tells his daughter, Nora, unsentimental stories of his time serving in Bangalla ("We tried to introduce law and order and some civilization in their miserable country") (Fig. 3.7).

Invited to a principality in the north of Bangalla, the General is unaware of the tensions that his visit provokes among the locals who are still trying to heal the colonial wound. Discussing his visit, the Rajah (a possible nod to, and relic of, Falk's placement of Bangalla closer to India) ruling the principality and his First Minister have not forgotten the violence enacted upon them by the British under the General's command. However, while the Minister is plotting to have the general assassinated ("He should die! I can't forget what he has done to me and my people!"),

VILKA SLOGS NI MOT?
ÅH, DET VAR SHEJKEN AV PALMORE, NUREDDIN DEN LILLE, OCH HANS ÖKENKRIGARE ... DET VAR STURSKA GOSSAR MEN VI LYCKADES KVÄSA DERAS UPPROR!
SÅ SPÄNNANDE! VARFÖR GJORDE DOM UPPROR?
TJA, SÄJ DET! DOM HAR ALLTID VARIT LITE HALSSTARRIGA! VI FÖRSÖKTE INFÖRA LAG OCH ORDNING OCH LITE CIVILISATION I DERAS ELÄNDIGA LAND - MEN DET PASSADE DOM INTE!

Fig. 3.7 During the car ride, the General informs his daughter that the British sought to introduce law and civilization in the principality (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

the Rajah wants to avoid vengeance as he is aware of the continuing interdependency of Europe and the former colonies ("Let the past rest in the past. We're dependent on good international relationships – even with the former colonial power").

After the Phantom arrives in time to prevent General Williams from being killed, the Minister resorts to kidnapping Nora. He tells her the truth about her father ("They captured the city and we resorted to guerrilla warfare! For four years your father kept the city captured!"), and the devastating consequences his rule had on the local population as he confiscated all there was to eat in the principality to feed his soldiers ("People starved to death"). The Phantom, having overheard the conversation, confronts the General who defends his actions by claiming that he was only following orders. In response, the Minister screams out "you're an unscrupulous murderer – a war criminal!" while throwing a punch at General Williams. Not taking sides, the Phantom launches a physical attack on the Minister and his men to disarm them before turning to the General for an uncommon verbal attack ("You're truly astoundingly stupid, General! These people hate your guts and you don't even realize why!") (Fig. 3.8).

The story thrives on ideological polarization as the General, filled with colonial nostalgia and mourning the loss of empire, encapsulates the colonial ideology: In rationalizing his mission as an attempt to introduce "civilization," his statement alludes to the rhetoric employed to legitimize

FÖR ATT VISA NORA DOM PLATSER, DÄR JAG KÄMPAT ÄRORIKT!...
NI ÄR VERKLIGEN HÄPNADSVÄCKANDE DUM I HUVUDET, GENERAL! DETTA FOLK HATAR ER SOM PESTEN OCH NI FÖRSTÅR INTE ENS VARFÖR!

Fig. 3.8 The Phantom rebukes General Williams who says that he wanted to show his daughter those places where he had fought gloriously (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

European imperialism, insofar as it claimed to consciously set out to modernize, develop, instruct and civilize (Said 1994). Difference is turned into subordination as the colonial text, embodied by General Williams who suggests that the geopolitical space in question lacks "civilization" as well as "law and order," emphasizes the perceived shortcomings of the natives—their backwardness and ignorance—so that imperialism could be justified as a necessary, albeit sometimes unfortunate, step to supersede savagery (Mignolo 1999). In a manner reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's (1969, 258) famous dictum—"There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism"—the comic blurs the distinction between civilization and barbarism by uncovering the destructive logic often hidden underneath keywords such as "modernization," "development" and "civilization," revealing the violence enacted upon colonized populations in their name (Aman 2017). This receives its fictional outlet in the Phantom's response when Nora asks how she is ever going to be able to thank him: "By telling the truth about your people's warfare here!" (Fig. 3.9).

The genitive construction is key in the above sentence. By referring to the British as "your people" when referencing the past events of colonial rule, the Phantom, in spite of his Anglo-Saxon genes, instantly removes himself from any ties of kinship to Great Britain. Recognizing the Phantom's genealogy would spark ambiguity as it opens up a reading of the character as a colonial settler. Differently put, for the Phantom to hint at kinship with Britain here, to speak of "our country" or "my ancestors'

SENARE ...
HUR SKA JAG KUNNA TACKA ER ?
GENOM ATT BERÄTTA SANNINGEN OM DITT LANDS KRIGFÖRING HÄR !
SENARE I RAJANS PALATS ...
SÅ DET VAR MAGUL, SOM LÅG BAKOM DÖDANDET AV DEN HELIGA KON !

Fig. 3.9 The Phantom informing Nora that the best way to thank him is by telling the truth about the violence Britain enacted on the local population (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

homeland" in place of "your," would negatively impact the purity of his morals by addressing a family line that runs through Britain's period of imperial expansion. This is not to suggest that the historical background of the Phantom dynasty is kept a secret in the Swedish scripts. On the contrary, as pointed out by Gudmundsson (2015) in the introductory chapter, historical adventures form a large part of the body of work of Team Fantomen, in which the connection to Britain is made explicit to such a degree that the Phantom dynasty plays a part in the mythology of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.[6] However, what I am suggesting is that the Swedish scripts avoid statements that connect the Phantom to the nationality of his ancestors when the emphasis is on condemning British colonial practices.

The reason for this becomes apparent in light of the editor Granberg's (1990) observation that the readers, like himself, have always considered the Phantom a Swedish hero. In the same way as Sweden conceals its involvement in the slave trade in order to sustain a national self-image as beacon of human rights, social justice and antiracism (Jonsson 2005), making the Ghost Who Walks Swedish—the transformation from the Phantom to Fantomen—allows him to pass uncontaminated by the burden of colonial legacies. This way the Phantom can award himself moral superiority in relation to General Williams, the same moral superiority to the imperialist nations that Sweden grants itself. In line with Schough's (2008) analysis above, this moral advantage works in two directions: Besides superiority to General Williams as an embodiment of the British Empire, all the locals, stretching from remote jungle villages up to the Presidential Palace in Mawitaan, are filled with awe before the Phantom. Although with less explicit racial undertones as has previously been uncovered in Falk's stories, European innate superiority over native people remains a powerful trope that reaffirms a hierarchy of racial difference also in the Swedish scripts.

Furthermore, the resolution to the drama allows the Phantom to embody the neutrality that plays an important part in Sweden's positioning of itself as an international moral authority (Nilsson 1991). With Nora on her way back to Britain, her kidnapper stands trial for his crimes. Informed about what has happened, the Rajah sees no other option than to put his minister on death row where his life can only be spared if he wins a competition based on who can hold their breath longest under water. The Phantom decides to represent the minister and subsequently wins the competition, saving his life. When the Rajah asks why he did it

and how he picked a side in this complicated conflict with historical roots, the Phantom responds that he was on both sides for the sake of the principality and Nora. Acting as a diplomat, an intermediary between arrogant colonizers and vengeful colonized subjects, the Phantom performs a role in foreign policy that, under the rule of the Social Democratic Party, became a Swedish hallmark during the Cold War (Ottosson 2003). From this viewpoint, the Phantom's actions conform to an ideal of Sweden; he embodies a national fantasy of resolving international conflicts with, as underlined by Palme (2006, 230), "reason." Palme then adds that in any attempt to combine peace with national liberation, there must be "moral values as the basis for action," moral values that are here embodied in an American superhero residing in Africa but personifying Swedish ideals. Nonetheless, there are also historically burdened conflicts in which even the Phantom sees no other alternative than struggle—even armed one. This is the focus in the next chapter.

Notes

1. *Fantomen*, 8/1963, script: Bertil Wilhelmsson, art: Özcan Eralp.
2. *Fantomen*, 16/1971, script: Janne Lundström, art: Bertil Wilhelmsson.
3. *Fantomen*, 3/1973, script: Janne Lundström, art: Bertil Wilhelmsson.
4. Historically in Sweden, and even more so in their home country of Denmark, folk high schools have been an alternative educational pathway for groups who have not gained access to other established educational institutions such as universities. In contrast to many other forms of formal schooling, the pedagogy developed at the folk high schools is characterized by horizontal relationships between teachers and students (Dahlstedt and Nordvall 2011).
5. *Fantomen*, 26/1970, script: Janne Lundström, art: Bertil Wilhelmsson.
6. E.g., *Fantomen*, 19/1975, script: Ulf Granberg and Jaime Vallvé, art: Jaime Vallvé; *Fantomen*, 13/1981, script: Norman Worker, art: Jaime Vallvé.

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CHAPTER 4

Apartheid and Antiracism

Abstract This chapter deals with the ways in which *The Phantom* comic book in Sweden was transformed into a leading example of antiracist politics and anti-apartheid protest literature. Southern Africa, with societies benighted by institutionalized racism, is inscribed into the plots, offering a radical attempt to break down the barrier between the comic pages and real-world events. This chapter contends that *The Phantom* played an important part in shaping Swedish public discourse on apartheid, while also helping to establish Sweden as a leading international antiracist voice.

Keywords The Phantom · Apartheid · Team Fantomen · International solidarity · ANC · Anti-racism

The Sharpeville massacre of March 21, 1960, in which the South African police opened fire on several thousand black protestors, killing sixty-nine of them, galvanized Swedish public opinion into greater action. Shortly afterward, representatives of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) visited Sweden pleading for an international boycott of South African commodities. Both the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Co-operative Union and Wholesale Society decided to immediately join the embargo of goods produced in South Africa. Various committees and associations in solidarity with southern Africa were formed all over the country, and Per Wästberg, who

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had been expelled from Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) in 1959, published his seminal anti-apartheid book, *På svarta listan* (*On the Black List*). 90,000 copies were sold in Sweden alone, representing a watershed in reporting on southern Africa. The book would become a staple of discussion in study circles across the country (Sellström 2002).

Other writers would soon follow, most notably Sara Lidman who, inspired by Wästberg, wrote two widely acclaimed novels about the situation in South Africa. For Lidman, recognized as a significant political opinion maker, apartheid was not merely a South African concern, but the responsibility of the whole Western world due to the exploitation of Africa. In her diary from South Africa, she states that "the blacks have shouldered the whites' burden for centuries." In her view, all of us in the West—including Sweden, which prides itself on being a beacon of human rights—have blood on their hands and guilt for what was occurring in the southernmost parts of the African continent (Jonsson 2005).

By the mid-1960s, all of these initiatives had placed the issue of South Africa center stage in the national political debate. In response to the growing domestic pressure, and to its own inclinations, the Social Democratic government began contributing generously to movements in southern Africa fighting against the injustices of colonial or postcolonial rule (Gleijeses 2005). In 1968, Foreign Minister Torsten Nilsson made a pivotal statement of intent specifically targeting apartheid, declaring that Sweden was among the states urging greater efforts to terminate South Africa's policy of racial discrimination (Sellström 2002). Future Prime Minister Olof Palme (2006, 234) went even further, declaring that "[t]he basic moral values of democratic socialism oblige us to stand with the oppressed against the oppressors, on the miserable and poor people's side against their exploiters and masters."

The Phantom is on the same page. In issue 3/1975, he declares that "in Southern Africa, people of color aren't treated much better than yesterday's slaves!"[1]; a statement that echoes Lidman's diary entry on the historical link between slavery and practices of apartheid. For someone who has sworn a solemn oath to devote his life to combating "all forms of piracy, greed and cruelty," affirming his distaste for societies built around the ideology of apartheid is not an illogical progression. At least not according to Team Fantomen who exemplify that this antiracist discourse of solidarity with southern Africa was not only produced through the arguments of political and academic elites; it was also constituted through

one particular comic book. In short, opposition to apartheid is performed here in the form of protest literature disguised as a superhero comic book.

Enter Rodia

The inaugural episode by Team Fantomen, "Den döda floden" (*The Dead River*), appearing in issue 1/1972,[2] is a case in point of the different meaning that *The Phantom* takes on when reimagined through the prism of New Left politics. The caption on the first panel informs the reader of what is at stake: "The jungle is untouched by the blessings of civilization. One of these 'blessings' is pollution. Therefore the Alua people didn't understand what had happened to their beautiful, rich river…." The focus on ecological issues is no coincidence considering the direct links between the New Left and the broader environmentalist movement (e.g., Klimke and Scharloth 2008). In the wake of 1968, critiques of the *raison d'être* of capitalism—profits and continual growth—were melded together with new understandings of the impact of economic growth on the environment. "What matters for multinational corporations," the Phantom loudly declares in another issue linking global capital to contaminations of nature in the Global South, "is profit… not people…."[3]

René Dumont, for example, in his 1973 pamphlet *l'utopie ou la mort!*, concludes that the Western world is depleting the planet's resources, causing unprecedented pollution and impoverishing developing countries. The next panel of "The Dead River" shows black men armed with spears and arrows against a backdrop of smoke and fire with the caption informing the reader that the devastation of natural resources "is the reason that something else reached the jungle – war!". Faithful to the ideological compass of the New Left, the comic pedagogically uncovers who ultimately pays the price for capitalist civilization. In a manner akin to the creators' ironic use of "blessings of civilization" in the caption, Dumont sees pollution as a direct consequence of capitalism's exploitation of nature in the name of modernization.

When the Phantom arrives on the scene, he manages to broker peace while being briefed about the war that erupted when one tribe started fishing in the rivers belonging to another tribe because their own had become poisoned. As the authoritative voice in the jungle, the Phantom decides that the tribes will have to share fishing waters until he has further investigated the reasons for the pollution. The trail leads to a nearby factory. Didactic in its intent, the comic pinpoints the role of capitalism as a

DET MÅSTE VARA NÅT SLAGS GIFT SOM SPRIDS I FLODEN---
HÄR HAR VI ALLTSÅ GIFTSPRIDAREN! DET SKA VERKLIGEN BLI INTRESSANT ATT SE VAD SOM FINNS I SLUTET AV RÖRET---

Fig. 4.1 The Phantom locates the source of the pollution of the river (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

catalyst for local conflicts, where industrialists, in their constant pursuit of profit, destroy the natural resources on which other people are dependent for survival (Fig. 4.1).

In conversation with his long-time friend, President Luaga, the Phantom learns that the factory is owned by a former government minister ("Minister Stevens? Yes, that's what I feared"); the new recurring villain introduced by Team Fantomen who was discussed in the previous chapter, representing the white colonial elite clinging onto considerable power and influence despite the nation's process of decolonization. The head of state explains that the Stevens family were among the first whites to establish themselves in Bangalla. Under British rule, the Stevens started Africa's first weapons factory, and their most important customer is the neighboring nation of Rodia.[4] The Phantom, dressed as his civilian alter-ego Mr. Walker in a gray trench coat and hat, listens carefully as the nation's president clarifies that the government ceased all forms of trade with Rodia when "the white population brutally started to repress the natives." The speech bubble stretches over an image of a park where a defenseless black man is being brutally beaten by two police officers. Like a snapshot of the perverse logic of racial separation implemented by the South African regime, there is a bench behind the man being assaulted with "For whites only" written on it, indicating that the felony the black man likely committed was to have a seat in a park. Yet Minister Stevens, President Luaga informs his inquisitive guest, resigned when he was unable to get the boycott against Rodia abolished (Fig. 4.2).

EFTER ATT DEN VITA BEFOLKNINGEN HÄNSYNSLÖST BÖRJADE FÖRTRYCKA DEN INFÖDDA BEFOLKNINGEN BESLÖT VÅR REGERING ATT STOPPA ALLT HANDELSUTBYTE MED RODIA---
ENDAST FÖR VITA

Fig. 4.2 The police brutally beating a black man next to a bench carrying a "for whites only" sign (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

The invention of Rodia—a fictional amalgam of South Africa and Rhodesia—allowed the Sweden-based scriptwriters to attempt to reconcile an antiracist discourse with the conventions of a typical *Phantom* narrative. That Rodia is an invention intended to appease a Swedish audience is confirmed by the creators. In an exchange with readers, writer Janne Lundström lists Rodia as the foremost example of the progressive direction that the Swedish interpretation of the Phantom's universe has taken. "This is not something that we brag about," Lundström explains. "Most people in Sweden find the racial persecution in South Africa and Rhodesia to be abominable. But the examples show that we seek to adapt *The Phantom* series so that it contains things that most Swedes find to be good."

What Scandinavian readers are perceived to sympathize with, however, may go against the grain of what is generally expected of the Phantom. Particularly interesting in this episode is not the measures taken by the hero to protect the environment and put Stevens behind bars, but the ways in which the Phantom's new political leanings are revealed in his sympathy for organizations devoted to armed struggle. Equipped with extraordinary deductive capabilities, the Phantom grasps that Minister Stevens is smuggling weapons across the border to Rodia. Shadowing a caravan of trucks loaded with arms, the Phantom watches as the convoy is stopped by a group of armed men. They present themselves as soldiers from the Rodian Liberation Army (RLA)—a fictional reference to the, at the time, outlawed and exiled organization ANC—with a clear motive: "We need weapons and ammunition to liberate Rodia's population from

the white oppressors." Having surveyed the situation, the Phantom takes charge by revealing himself to the surprised soldiers. In an unexpected turn of events, the Phantom, instead of confiscating or destroying the weapons in the name of peace and non-violence, informs the revolutionary troops that they "can consider the weapons as a gift from the people of Bangalla" (Fig. 4.3).

For the Phantom to sympathize with guerrilla warfare against the ruling regime is not a given—indeed, it would be unfathomable in Falk's universe, steeped as it was in conservatism. Before his encounter with the RLA, the Phantom's most recent witnessing of an uprising was in issue 14/1968 in a plot based on the 1857 Indian Rebellion against the rule of the British East India Company.[5] In that conflict, he sides with the white colonial elite, as the rebels are referred to as "bandits." The unexpected hero of the story is a young local servant who, with the Ghost Who Walks on his side, remains loyal to the white overlords, fighting against his fellow countrymen.[6] According to Bo Lundin (1971), this episode is a clear illustration of the schizophrenic nature of interpretations of the Phantom character. Although he is careful to underscore how Team Fantomen has pushed the masked crusader in a progressive left-wing direction, Lundin maintains that the republishing of older episodes—especially those of Falk—undermines the desire to furnish the Phantom with a different political agenda, as a single copy of the comic book can contain episodes with contradictory doctrines.

In relation to the RLA storyline, what cannot be overlooked is how the plot, intentionally or subconsciously, offers a direct commentary on

OCH VI BEHÖVER VAPNEN OCH AMMUNITIONEN FÖR ATT BEFRIA RODIAS BEFOLKNING FRÅN DOM VITA FÖRTRYCKARNA!
DÅ KAN NI BETRAKTA VAPNEN SOM EN GÅVA FRÅN BENGALIS FOLK---

Fig. 4.3 The Phantom informing the guerrilla that they can consider the weapon as a gift from Bangalla (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

the polarized debate taking place at the time regarding the nature of Swedish foreign aid. Besides the ANC with whom the Social Democratic government engaged in direct cooperation, Stockholm provided financial aid to other liberation movements espousing armed struggle against their white rulers in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Rhodesia and South Africa.[7] Government officials developed warm relationships with several leaders of these revolutionary armies, and the program was supported by a large cross section of the Swedish public, bridging the deep divisions that characterized Swedish domestic politics (Gleijeses 2005). In Piero Gleijeses' (2005) view, however, Sweden's position on foreign aid to liberation movements was hypocritical. On the one hand, Stockholm was providing non-military assistance to the armed struggle of the guerrillas because it deemed their cause to be just. On the other hand, the various governments consistently refused to supply these movements with the tools most essential to their cause: weapons. In practice this hardly had any effect as these liberation armies, which were predominantly Marxist or Leninist in orientation, received their arms from the Soviet Union. Yet many Swedes, Gleijeses (2005) notes, criticized this restriction. Especially affiliates of the New Left who often saw armed struggle as necessary to achieve change and, eventually, emancipation (Gilcher-Holtey 2000). Through his actions, the Phantom informs the reader about his position in the debate, and that of the people of Bangalla whom he claims to represent in the account above: arming liberation movements is necessary to aid their cause.

American Identity Crisis, Swedish Progressiveness

The meticulous *Phantom Encyclopedia*, compiled by Jim Shepherd and Barry Stubbersfield and by far the most exhaustive resource on the world of the Phantom, contains one noteworthy omission. Among the alphabetical entries on anything and everything to do with the Phantom, Rodia is nowhere to be seen. There may be several reasons for this, speaking to the international reception of the Swedish creators' work on the Phantom. Australian readers, Patrick (2012) reveals, complained that the stories of Team Fantomen were unnecessarily complicated and frequently came across as a moral history lesson. Yet a more plausible explanation is political. Frew Publications, publisher of the Australian *Phantom* as well as the encyclopedia, has tended to regard the adventures written by Lee Falk as the official ones. And Falk never made Rodia part of his own plots.[8]

Responding to a fan letter in the members' pages of issue 15/1972 accusing the Phantom of racism, Lundström asserts that the Phantom is a superhero in keeping with the times. To support his claims, Lundström points to the fact that when Falk created the Phantom, most countries in Africa were colonies—including Bangalla. Now they are postcolonial nations within as well as outside the comic's pages. Lundström also admits, however, that there are certain issues that Falk is prevented from addressing for commercial reasons. "Current problems such as, for example, racial persecution in South Africa and Rhodesia Lee Falk does not dare to address. Then his readers back home in the USA would stop reading the comic." What Lundström hints at here are the parallels between the systems of apartheid in southern Africa and the Jim Crow laws enforcing racial segregation in the southern United States until their abolition in 1965. Regardless of Falk's political beliefs—"My only politics is up with democracy and down with dictatorships," he commented in an interview, "down with human rights violations, down with torture" (quoted in Friese 1999)—Lundström's response can be interpreted as a suggestion that Falk privileges commercial interests over political commitment and an assertion of the progressiveness of Sweden in comparison with the United States.

In fairness to Falk, he was not alone in the American comic book industry in his feelings of discomfort with racial issues. By the end of the 1960s, the Cold War consensus that previously characterized American identity and its role in the world had blurred into greater ambiguity (Costello 2009). American writers and artists started to increasingly question the morality of the Cold War—visible in the *Iron Man* comic's shift from stern anticommunism to challenging the ability of capitalism to promote equality or justice in the United States. But the adjustments in their politics did not necessarily always extend into debates on race. In the case of Marvel, several black characters—Black Panther, Luke Cage and the Falcon—were given more prominent roles signaling an attempt to deal with racial issues in a more serious manner. Yet, Costello (2009) reminds, the industry was still dominated by white men who, like Falk, often adopted a patronizing tone when addressing the increasingly salient question of representation and diversity, especially when treating issues of black identity.

A prominent example of this is a storyline from *Captain America and the Falcon* published in 1971, in which the Falcon is beaten by a group

of radical black power activists.[9] In contrast to his violent black nationalist attackers, the Falcon himself represents the moderate integrationist vision. There is never any doubt as to which side the creators of the comic are taking in the conflict between two different understandings of race relations. After preventing black nationalists from burning Harlem to the ground, Captain America and the Falcon discover that their nemesis, Nazi agent the Red Skull, is one of the movement's leaders. Black nationalism—portrayed as a militant ideology—is thus equated with Nazism, further delegitimizing black power activists as a credible voice in racial debates (Costello 2009). By contrast, as will be elaborated upon below, political consensus remained potent in Sweden with regard to support for armed resistance in the Third World.

The Phantom and the Guerrilla

Team Fantomen continued to emphasize the hero's radical edge, addressing precisely the concerns, democracy and human rights, that Falk claimed were central to his political agenda—or more accurately, addressing their absence in the context of apartheid. In the story "Slavarbetarna" (*The Slaves*),[10] the Phantom finds himself inquiring into the disappearance of young tribe members who have left the jungle to earn a living in Mawitaan. Snooping around gritty parts of the capital, the Phantom discovers that the trail again leads to Rodia. Undercover Rodian government officials take advantage of the high unemployment rates in Bangalla to recruit desperate workers. On the other side of the border in Rodia, the Phantom locates the destination of the imported labor force: the iron mines. From his panoptical position overlooking the camp, he learns that race is not the only significant axis of power underpinning the logic of apartheid. "It is here then that the whites in Rodia," the Phantom comments behind the binoculars, "earn easy money."

Like any treasure trove, the mine is well protected. The panels zoom in on the armed guards patrolling what is inside the barbed wired fences before arriving at a snapshot of the workers' barracks. Present inside are workers who have come from different corners of the African continent, united only by their social status and the color of their skin—features that, in the context of apartheid, were inseparable. True to contemporary events, the comic illustrates how black migrants from other parts of Africa, when they arrived in South Africa, joined the ranks of black indigenous people languishing at the bottom of the racial hierarchy (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013) (Fig. 4.4).

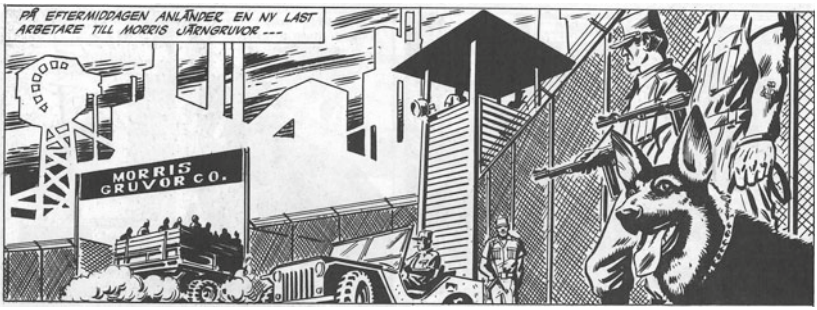

Fig. 4.4 A new shipment of workers arrives at the iron mine in Rodia (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

Situating the plot around a mine adds reference points for the politically minded Swedish reader of the comic. After the success of her anti-apartheid novels from South Africa, Sara Lidman documented working conditions in the mines in northern Sweden in a widely praised 1968 book called, concisely, *Gruva* (*Mine*). Through interviews with the workers and ensuing references to Frantz Fanon—whose *The Wretched of the Earth* had been translated into Swedish in 1962 to great acclaim, becoming a key text for the New Left—she argued that Swedish mine workers were victims of the same global system of oppression that also affects people in the Third World. She was not alone. Other influential leftist writers at the time, most notably Göran Palm and Jan Myrdal, concluded that Swedish workers were not positioned in an antagonistic relationship with the Third World, but were instead united in the same struggle against capitalism and imperialism (Ljunggren 2009). Like their brothers and sisters in southern Africa and elsewhere in the colonial world, Lidman (1968) argues, Swedish workers are subjected to semi-feudal conditions to ensure profit for the owners. In this sense, the situation in the Third World is a mirror through which the shortcomings of Swedish society can be studied; the oppression of the mine workers in Rodia is translatable to the experiences of Swedish workers carrying out the same labor.

Outside the camp, the Phantom realizes that to succeed in freeing the workers he will need help. Without deliberating over his options, he turns immediately to the RLA. Blindfolded and again disguised as his alias Mister Walker, he is brought to the guerrillas' secret headquarters

deep in the Rodian jungle where he is introduced to the highest officer among the freedom fighters. “So you’re Colonel X,” the Phantom asks the man on the opposite side of the desk, “the legendary guerrilla leader?” In keeping with the logic of a storyline steeped in revolutionary romanticism and before Nelson Mandela had reached international fame, the colonel is portrayed as a black Che Guevara. In addition to certain physical resemblances, the Colonel is fully equipped with the accessories that became trademarks for leftist youths worldwide, recognizable from iconic photographs of the Argentinian: the army jacket, the beret and the pipe. Other members of the guerrilla group in turn evoke familiar images of the Black Panthers—another group held in esteem by the New Left in Sweden—preferring to combine their berets with dark shades (Polite 2007). For all their sartorial excellence, they remain unconvinced about the motives of the mysterious white stranger requesting their assistance (“I want to liberate all the Bangallians from the mine! You know the escape routes…”) (Fig. 4.5).

The Swedish Phantom, in contrast to Captain America’s hesitant approach to the civil rights movement in the United States, goes so far as to embed himself in the revolutionary struggle.[11] To persuade the soldiers, the Phantom plays his strongest hand: revealing his true identity by removing the sunglasses and the trench coat. Slightly taken aback by the Phantom’s presence, the Colonel welcomes him to the revolutionary army (“if you’re only a tenth as good as in the tales of my grandfather we’ll have good use of you!”). The paradox of the Phantom aligning himself with guerrilla warfare, regardless of his commendable motives, is

KAPTEN OKWE MED EN MAN ANMÄLER SEJ, ÖVERSTE !
DET ÄR BRA ! SLÅ ER NER !
NI ÄR ALLTSÅ ÖVERSTE X, DEN LEGENDARISKE GERILLA-LEDAREN ?
VEM ÄR DEN HÄR MANNEN, KAPTEN?
HAN TOG KONTAKT MED OSS GENOM VÅR MAN VID MORRIS-GRUVAN ...

Fig. 4.5 The Phantom introduces himself to the guerrilla leader (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

that democratic utopianism can be defended only through antidemocratic means. Seen in this way, the argument can still be made that the Phantom remains true to fascist ideals through his enforcement of unsanctioned violence, as has been debated in relation to this character as well as other superheroes (Gavaler 2016).

Here, however, the impact of Frantz Fanon cannot be underestimated. Fanon presents moral arguments for violence as an inevitable response to the ferocity perpetrated by the oppressor, drawing on his experiences in the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) fought against France. Colonialism "is naked violence," Fanon (2004 [1966], 23) writes, "and only gives in when confronted with greater violence." For him there is no possibility of concession, as decolonization in itself is a violent clash between antagonistic forces as the exploited realize that their liberation requires using every means available. And violent force, Fanon reminds us, is the first (Fig. 4.6).

Support for revolutionary movements fighting for liberation was firm in Sweden during the 1970s, at least on the left of the political spectrum. Where Karl Marx had previously pointed to the proletariat as the defining actor of history, the New Left embraced the people in the former colonies as the primary driving force of the revolutionary struggle (Berntson and Nordin 2017). Radical leftists celebrated social and political movements in the Third World as a renewal of the socialist tradition and as a forceful push for their own projects of transforming First World societies (Elbaum 2018; Kalter 2017). Conservative voices have labeled the events of 1968 a "philanthropic revolution," where the revolutionary body was made up

Fig. 4.6 The Phantom and the Rodian Liberation Army ready for battle (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

of privileged students, academics, and writers from predominantly middle-class backgrounds (e.g., Berntson and Nordin 2017). By revolting against the sufferings of the Third World, in addition to defending workers' rights at home, so the argument goes, the revolutionaries could rid themselves of their guilt both as the progeny of colonialist Europeans and, more generally, as bourgeois (Wolin 2010).

In addition to the potential pursuit of a clean conscience, another reward was moral superiority. In tandem with, and as a consequence of, the rise of the New Left, Sweden started to brand itself as a humanitarian role model, presenting itself as a radical utopia of equality guided by democratic and egalitarian principles (Habel 2012). As stated in the preceding chapter, this is often accredited to the long-term dominance of the Social Democratic Party (e.g., Linderborg 2001; Lödén 1999) in combination with an evolving discourse on "Swedish exceptionalism" of the country as exceptionally colorblind and non-racist (e.g., Hübinette and Lundström 2011; Schierup and Ålund 2011). Hence, the strong and widespread critique of apartheid, in conjunction with economic support for liberation movements, added credibility to Sweden's positioning itself as a leading anticolonial voice (Bjereld and Demker 1995).

From this perspective, the Phantom's assumption that he is on the right side of history in fighting for his storyworld's version of the ANC loses some of its radical edge. Of all the liberation movements throughout Africa, the ANC in particular received Sweden's unequivocal support, allowing the creators to demonstrate the altered politics of the comic by positioning the Phantom in a political context where his heroics are in service of an organization considered, in Tore Sellström's words, "a Cinderella" in the eyes of the domestic public (Sellström 2002, 583). In fact, when the Phantom teams up with revolutionary forces, he endorses an organization that Swedish governments—irrespective of which party was in the majority—regarded for decades as a government-in-waiting (Sellström 2002). In short, Swedish storylines that might be perceived as radical by readers from elsewhere are in fact expressing opinions that would be considered mainstream by most local readers.

In line with Fanon's observation of the necessity for revolutionary struggle to physically bring down the supporting structures—social, political and economic—of the colonizer, the RLA blows the mine to pieces in order to hurt Rodia's material base. When Colonel X thanks his mask-wearing ally for his involvement, the Phantom responds that he was only carrying out his duty, akin to the obligation of the RLA, to help the

people of the jungle against oppressors, reaffirming that the guerrilla and the Ghost Who Walks fight for a similar cause. Less an American-created superhero residing in a fictional African nation-state, the Phantom is transformed here into an avatar for Swedish foreign policy. Without seeking anything in return, merely desiring to help the oppressed against their oppressors, the Ghost Who Walks seamlessly embodies those altruistic motives with which Sweden self-identified. Hence, the Phantom and Sweden are one, which helps explain why readers, as well as the creative team, considered the character a Swedish hero (Granberg 1990) (Fig. 4.7).

Far from an armchair activist, the Phantom executes in practice Prime Minister Olof Palme's (1977, 24) statement before the UN Security Council that in the context of southern Africa "[a]ction must be taken designed to end a system which is both evil in itself and a threat to peace." Palme's foreign policy, according to scholars, is a prime example of the impact of the New Left on party politics (Ljunggren 2009). With Marxism as a tool for changing and interpreting the world, the New Left was committed to taking action. Subsequently, the "put your body on the line" tradition ran strong among New Left activist, where Che Guevara's efforts to bring revolution to other parts of Latin America were admirably seen as theory and practice in perfect harmony (Elbaum 2018). Or as the Phantom himself declares in the final panel of the story, in response to his close confidant Guran's recitation of a newspaper article about the humanitarian abuses in the mines of Rodia: "To read is not enough – you have to act too!".

VI KÖR ER SNABBAST MÖJLIGT TILL GRÄNSEN, SEN FÅR NI KLARA ER SJÄLVA!
TACK! SNART KAN DOM HÄR POJKARNA FÖRENAS MED SINA FAMILJER IGEN!
OCH NU VILL JAG TACKA ER FÖR ER INSATS I VÅR BEFRIELSEKAMP!

Fig. 4.7 Colonel X thanks the Phantom for his contribution to their revolutionary struggle (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

Forbidden Love

Another way to unmask the immorality of apartheid is through the trope of love—especially prohibited love. Issue 1/1977, "På förbjuden mark" (*On forbidden land*), is a Shakespearean Romeo and Juliet story in the context of apartheid.[12] The story opens with a pronouncement: Overlooking the border with Rodia, the Ghost Who Walks speaks up about his feelings on the neighboring country: "there govern a few hundred thousand white people, refusing to grant eight million Africans voting rights and human rights… racial discrimination!". His discourse is interrupted by the sound of a helicopter. True to his instincts, the Phantom sprints in its direction to discover that the chopper comes from Rodia and has illegally entered Bangallian air space. He can hear the helicopter landing and moves even faster in its direction. When he arrives on the scene, a seriously injured man is lying on the ground with a woman sitting next to him as armed men, having disembarked from the helicopter, are quickly approaching them. Although he manages to disarm the men, the Phantom is unable to prevent them from escaping in the helicopter with the woman as their prisoner. To save the man's life, the Phantom transports him to the jungle hospital. In grave pain, the injured man explains that his name is Abraham Ndaba, a law student at the University of Rodia, and that the woman who was abducted is his wife Sara. Before falling unconscious, he pleads with the Phantom to save his wife. A photograph is hidden in his boot showing Abraham with Sara after their marriage. The photo is stamped with a location: the Church of St. Mary in Lowfield, Marcusburg, Rodia. Immoral love in the context of apartheid: He is black and she is white; a union banned first by custom, then by law (Thielmann 1997) (Fig. 4.8).

Determined to reunite the newlyweds, the Ghost Who Walks heads to Marcusburg, the capital of Rodia (Marcusburg does not allude to Johannesburg where the name of one disciple has merely been replaced by another but is in fact, editor-in-chief Granberg admits, a sly dig at Marcus Wallenberg, influential representative of the Swedish industrial tradition and head of the prominent and wealthy family). From the backseat of a taxi on his way to St. Mary's Church, he inspects his surroundings in white suburbia as the caption didactically reminds the reader that race and class are conjoined in Rodia like no other place in the world ("The white people in Rodia have the highest living standards in the world… that's noticeable!").

ETT BRÖLLOPSFOTO OCH ETT ÄKTENSKAPSBEVIS DET MÅSTE VARA DET HÄR RHODIERN LETADE EFTER!
Church of St Mary
LOWFIELD, MARCUSBURG
DOM TVÅ DOKUMENTEN ÄR ALLT JAG BEHÖVER! HÄLSA ABRAHAM ATT JAG SKA HÄMTA HANS HUSTRU!

Fig. 4.8 The Phantom discovers a wedding photo of the black Abraham and the white Sara, and immediately sets off for Rodia to bring Sara back (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

At the gates of Lowfield, a racially segregated township suspiciously like Soweto, the Phantom discovers that it is a sprawl of cramped homes organized by apartheid to house the black labor pool for white Marcusburg ("The 100,000 Africans working in Marcusburg as servants and laborers aren't allowed to decide where they want to live, they have been forced together in special neighborhoods with old, rundown houses, barracks of boards and corrugated sheet metal, shells of cardboard and old crating.…") and that he, due to being white, needs a permit to enter. Hence, the comic informs us that the city's urban makeup is far from organic—it is the result of social engineering to maintain racial segregation. Ignoring the rules of bureaucracy, the Phantom sneaks into Lowfield and locates the priest of St Mary's who married Sara and Abraham. He is in for a shocking surprise: Abraham and Sara's marriage is special, the priest explains, as the bride is the daughter of Rodia's Minister of Security, the feared torture expert General Jonathan Smith.

The Phantom wastes no time. After breaking into the General's bedroom in the middle of the night to inquire into Sara's whereabouts, he learns that she has been detained at an asylum. To denounce sexual acts between whites and blacks as abnormal and criminal was, as Anne McClintock (2007) notes, part of a racial discourse on madness by which an independent woman or African were defined as insane. Aside from its metafictional reference to the Racial Immorality Act that forbade sexual intimacy between blacks and whites in South Africa, the plot is underpinned by a father's betrayal of his own flesh and blood. Represented as

an embodiment of apartheid, the General privileges racial hatred above the happiness of his own daughter, equating her love for a black person with mental illness. The Phantom is equally judgmental: "What fatherly love! To imprison one's own daughter in an asylum merely to retain a despicable job!".

In essence, the father personifies incomprehensible evil, and in pivoting around such a case of clear-cut villainy this *Phantom* storyline aligns itself with the broader public-relations efforts of committees and associations in solidarity with southern Africa. According to Rob Nixon (1994), the successful internationalization of anti-apartheid movements was dependent on the discursive transformation of apartheid into an essentially moral issue: a showdown between good and evil, victims and villains, black and white, oppressed and the oppressors, the masses and a racist minority. In the chain of events that follows, the Phantom makes Abraham's and Sara's relationship public by forcing Rodia's largest paper to publish their wedding photo on the cover. When the scandal breaks as the paper lands in kiosks around the country, the regime accuses the General, due to his daughter's actions, of being a "nigger lover" [*sic*], and has him killed during his arrest. Even a bloodthirsty regime loyalist of high esteem, the comic book demonstrates, can be sacrificed to maintain white supremacy in southern Africa.

Yet there is hope. Despite her upbringing in the belly of evil during the height of apartheid, Sara moves in another direction away from her father, having come to see that hatred and enmity is mimetic. Both symbolically and metaphorically she murders the father by defying the ideals he clings onto and defends in his exalted position within the racist system. In metaphorical terms, Sara kills her father by way of an actual exclusion of his influence and political beliefs; in symbolic terms, the father pays for her crimes with his life. In a system reliant on a devil's pact that delivers economic privilege in exchange for the denial of the humanity of the Other, Sara commits the ultimate treason for a white person: loving and marrying across racial divides. Such action profoundly damages the supporting structures of apartheid by challenging the system's very nature, in which black men and white women are seen to belong to different species (Fig. 4.9).

Eventually, the Phantom frees Sara from the asylum and manages with help from the priest of St Mary's to smuggle her across the border to Bangalla where Abraham awaits, still in his hospital bed. Besides their

Fig. 4.9 Abraham and Sara are finally united under the auspices of the Phantom (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

personal reunion as husband and wife, their union represents the possibility of reconciliation, a bridging of racial differences, in a country released from its racial imprisonment. The biblical references add thematic heft to this vision: Like Abraham and Sara in the Old Testament who on a direct instruction from God left the city of Ur for Hebron in order to become primogenitors of a population, their namesakes embody the idea of racial harmony in a future post-racial South Africa no longer under the rule of racial segregation. One minor detail here is that it is the Phantom who carries out the Lord's work of enabling Sara and Abraham to at some time in the future bestow on southern Africa a more human face. The moral of the story is simple: As long as there are conditions in which racist attitudes flourish, people are not free: not free to make their own choices, including choosing whom to love—something that is, just like the color of our skin, beyond choice.

* * *

On February 13, 1990, only a month after his release from prison, Nelson Mandela landed in Sweden. That Sweden was the destination for his

first international visit after twenty-seven years in custody was no coincidence. In his own account, speaking before the Swedish parliament, Mandela expressed his gratitude for the country's decades-long efforts to end a system of government based on racial segregation. Since the 1960s, Sweden had made payments of more than 400 million euros in humanitarian foreign aid to anti-apartheid organizations in the region. At the time of Mandela's release Swedish foreign aid accounted for over a third of the ANC's income (Rylander 2012). Then-Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson (quoted in Sellström 2002, 756) emphasized that the "deeply rooted and impressively broad [popular] commitment" was "both an explanation and a prior condition for [the government's] active policy." Neither Carlsson nor Mandela explicitly mentioned the impact of *The Phantom*. But as readers of the comic book already know, the Ghost Who Walks shies away from the public eye.

Notes

1. *Fantomen*, 3/1975, script: Janne Lundström; art: Özcan Eralp.
2. *Fantomen*, 1/1972, script: Magnus Knutsson; art: Jaime Vallvé.
3. *Fantomen*, 20/1978, script: Donne Avenell; art: Özclan Eralp.
4. In some early episodes, the country was named "Rhodia." For consistency, "Rodia" is used throughout this chapter as it is the name predominantly used both then and now.
5. *Fantomen*, 14/1968, script: Giovanni Fiorentini; art: Raul Buzzelli.
6. Interesting to note is that the Phantom revisits the events of the Indian Rebellion in an adventure by Team Fantomen. In this episode published as 12/1982 (script: Jaime Vallvé & Ulf Granberg; art: Jaime Vallvé), the title "The Murderer" has a double meaning. It both aims at the British officer who kills an Indian girl, daughter to one of the leaders of the rebellion, and how close the Phantom, filled with rage and sorrow, comes to killing the murdering officer in cold blood. Just before it's too late, he releases his grip around the officer's throat. The scene is the culmination of an episode in which the hero, in verbal speech, relentlessly condemns British imperialism.
7. These movements include the Movimento Popular de Libertaçâo de Angola (MPLA) and Frente de Libertaçâo de Moçambique (FRELIMO); the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU); the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) of Namibia, and the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa.

8. Tony De Paul, current writer for the American daily strip published by King Features Syndicate, has made frequent use of Rodia. A possible explanation for this may be that after the fall of apartheid, popular cultural representations of the system lost some of their sensitivity in an American context.
9. *Captain America and the Falcon*, 143/1971, script: Gary Friedrich; art: John Romita Sr.
10. *Fantomen*, 14/1972, script: Magnus Knutsson; art: Jaime Vallvé.
11. A notable exception is the Black Panther's guest appearance in *Fantastic Four*, 199/1972, in which he combats the white supremacist regime of the African nation-state of Rudyarda.
12. *Fantomen*, 1/1977, script: Janne Lundström; art: Jaime Vallvé.

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CHAPTER 5

The Women's Movements and Gender Politics

Abstract This chapter's focus is on gender and the representation of women, arguing that the sexual politics of the series was, by comparison, marginally more progressive than the representations of race. Although Falk made conscious efforts with time to ascribe Diana, the Phantom's wife, a more independent and modern demeanor, this chapter uncovers how he was unable to move away from the reductionist stereotype that a woman's true place is in the kitchen. This chapter makes the case that Team Fantomen's storyline drastically pushes the gender politics in *The Phantom* in a progressive direction, while also drawing attention to the fact that the artwork still attempts to appease the heterosexual male gaze.

Keywords Women's movement · Sexism · Gender politics · Masculinity · Femininity · The Phantom

Renowned avant-garde artist Carl Johan De Geer reveals, in his equally debated and contested 1978 artwork "Fantomen i Skanör" (*The Phantom in Skanör*), that the sexual suggestiveness common to many American comics of the postwar era was just as ingrained in *The Phantom* (e.g., Lavin 1998; Savage 1990). Based on a stash of *The Phantom* comics that De Geer had found on vacation in Italy (which explains the Phantom's red suit in all the images), and playing on Skanör's reputation as an exclusive Scandinavian resort town, the sado-erotic lithograph is made up of

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a patchwork of several images of the Phantom drawn by Ray Moore, the comic's first artist. In each one of these, he has a woman across his knees while spanking her. The artwork is an illustration of how the sexual politics of the series was, by comparison, marginally more progressive than the representations of race (as discussed in Chapter 2). Women are, in the early days of Falk's Phantom universe, similar to the natives of the jungle: they exist outside the circle of rational thought, slaves to their emotions, without overlooking the racial difference where white women, in contrast to non-whites irrespective of gender, are still ascribed agency in the series.

The second ever *The Phantom* daily story, 1936s "The Sky Band," is not merely a general reflection of the gender politics in the series at the time; it also contains all the tropes that De Geer sought to satirize.[1] In this particular adventure, the masked hero is confronted with a band of female air pirates who specialize in robbing British mail planes off the Indian coast.[2] These women, evidently competent enough to build up a secret organization capable of threatening the transportation routes of an entire continent, are all unable to keep their sanity in the presence of the masculine masked stranger and are drawn to him like a moth to a flame. After being captured by the band, the Phantom, to his immense surprise, discovers that the pirates are all women. Readers accustomed to Falk's plot twists, however, may be less astounded. According to comics historian Ron Goulart (2010, 10), writing about the early decades of the newspaper dailies, Falk's continual supply of "pretty young women" proved a major reason for the popularity of *The Phantom*. In particular, Goulart refers to how Falk had the masked hero go up against "female criminals, quite sexy ones." Moore's drawings reinforce this dimension, as when the gender of the pirates has been revealed to both the hero and the reader, the subsequent panels are drawn in such a way that the women, behind their disguising pilot uniforms, have plumper lips and pointed chins.

Nevertheless, the villains' femininity places the Phantom in an ambivalent position. On the one hand, he needs to put an end to the pirates' operation; on the other hand, he is unable to play out his customary tricks of superior deductive skills in combination with throwing punches. In a chivalrous gesture, he makes it abundantly clear that under no circumstances is he able to enforce violence against women due to their gender ("Can't slug a woman"). Instead, the Phantom has another trick up his sleeve that works more effectively on women than the force of violence: flattery ("Have to use peculiar weapons with women. But then, they're peculiar people"). He compliments the various pirates on their

I WOULD NOT BE FOOL ENOUGH TO TRY TO FLATTER A WOMAN LIKE YOU. BUT A FACT IS A FACT. YOU'RE THE LOVELIEST WOMAN I'VE EVER SEEN.
AH-HA-- YOU THINK FAST, MR. PHANTOM.
BUT THIS TROPICAL SUN IS JUST RUINING MY SKIN AND THE DAMP SEA AIR IS MAKING A MESS OF MY HAIR. I REALLY HAVE NT HAD A PERMANENT OR A FACIAL IN---YEARS.

Fig. 5.1 The Sky Band are mesmerized by the masked stranger's charming ways (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

looks ("You're the loveliest woman I've seen"), as they find themselves mesmerized by the masked man's charming ways ("I've never met a man like that before!") (Fig. 5.1).

The way in which he resolves the conflict becomes almost a tale of feminine specificity whereby the band is able to run a successful secret criminal operation as long as they keep an aggressive distance from all the men of the world. The Phantom's masculine presence means that female solidarity is replaced with sexual competition. Unable to control their emotions and carnal desires, the women start to compete among themselves for the masked man's attention. The Phantom executes his cunning plan to perfection by giving into the leader of the gang, the Baroness, making her believe that he is mutually in love with her. This is the beginning of the end for this once elusive criminal band of sisters. From this moment on, the Baroness, previously portrayed as a hard-nosed and intelligent leader, becomes anxious, shallow and jealous—in short, she embodies an exaggerated version of all the reductionist stereotypes about women that have varied little over time (Browne 1998; Zotos and Tsichla 2014). Paranoid that someone else will steal the Phantom's affections away from her, she even makes plans to have her fiercest competitor within the gang eliminated. Nevertheless, the sudden realization that the Phantom has been playing with her emotions all along drives the Baroness to suicide. When interpreting the situation, the Phantom relates the Baroness' actions to

her gender: "She betrayed the band and destroyed herself – because she was a woman – with a woman's heart and hate – and jealousy."

For the Phantom to resort to biological justifications in relation to gender roles in a script from the mid-1930s is not necessarily unusual considering how Golden and Silver Age comic books are marred by sexist writing and artwork—including Sue Storm of the Fantastic Four being relegated to the rest of the group's cheerleader, Superman spanking Lois Lane for being a "bad girl," or Batman's constant belittling of Batwoman. Not limited to comics, similar reflections on gender stereotyping and sexism have been made in relation to popular cinema (Tasker 1998), the media (Gauntlett 2003) and advertising (Cortese 2016). At the same time, the Phantom, through his sexist remark, offers a poignant example of French philosopher Michel Foucault's (1985, 158) assertion that sex-linked traits have historically defined gender roles as if "the gods endowed each of the two sexes with particular qualities." In reference to this historic polarization between what is considered as male and female, Foucault, in his analysis of ancient Greek texts, traces the emergence of general beliefs that men are assumed to have been created "brave" compared to women who are equipped with "natural fear." Viewed more broadly, these ideas about gender, Foucault continues, structure and depict which activities and behaviors are considered appropriate for, and linked to, men and women. Hence, for the Phantom to ascribe strong emotions such as jealousy and hate to being a woman is at the same time to say that he stands for the polar opposite. Not once does he allow his own sentiments to interfere with his loyalty to the mission at hand, embodying perceived masculine traits of braveness and intangibility.

The historian of ideas Ronny Ambjörnsson (1999) traces these exact masculine-coded qualities as the main theme in the adventure novels of *Tarzan* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Similar to *The Phantom,* these two novels—besides admittedly being great sources of inspiration for Falk in the sculpting of his own masked hero—are tales about self-control, taking control over time, body and nature by rejecting temptations, which stands in contrast to female dependence, softness and sensitivity (Ambjörnsson 1999). In opposition to the love-struck glares of the female pirates and their sudden inability to live without the masked stranger, the Phantom asserts his manliness by displaying a profound form of self-control. Not even when he finds himself unarmed with a gun in his face does the Ghost Who Walks flinch and lose his cool, which is emphasized by the amazed Baroness: "I've never met a man like that before. He was cool under

my gun." These panels depicting an unaffected Phantom starring straight into a gun barrel serve as a mere backdrop for a woman's act of witness, one that validates the hero's virility. In short, a woman's presence and testifying eyes are necessary for the Phantom's positioning as the epitome of masculine accomplishment.

Women as Children

During the first decades of *The Phantom* comic book women are generally loved, but at the same time resented. The comics express this resentment by embracing all the familiar stereotypes about women. Whether they are white or non-white, modern or primordial, young or old, women share a common inclination for gossip, jealousy, vanity and love; for Falk to have the Phantom declare that—as in the episode discussed above—"they're peculiar people" is to say all these things. Repeatedly, the comic books assert the image of women as a single monolithic entity, despite their individual, cultural and class differences (Torgovnick 1990). At the same time, this also plays a narrative role as their shared images of women often facilitate bonding between the Phantom and various other males that he runs into during his adventures.

A clear example of the above is the 1951 newspaper daily "The Governor's Wife," in which the Phantom takes it upon himself to discipline the wife and child of the Governor of the nation, indicating that the story was written before Bangalla went through a process of decolonization.[3] As it turns out, the Phantom's nurturing is a blessing from above for the Governor. Although the caption explains that he "rules the nation with an iron fist," the following panels reveal a different power balance at home. His young son, Bobbie, rebels ("I'm sick of school – and I won't go") while his wife, Myrna, is equally spoiled ("I need more allowance! You expect me to struggle along what you give me?") and grouchy ("I'm bored, living in this palace! Bored – bored with everything!"). The Governor's vocabulary in the domestic realm mirrors that of a submissive servant, limited to apologies ("I'm sorry!") or obedience ("Yes dear!") (Fig. 5.2).

The exact opposite of the dominant Victorian ideology of the "Angel in the House" that characterized female portraits in many of the colonial novels that Falk consumed (e.g., Jagpal 2009), Myrna seemingly lacks all the desired female virtues of warmth and modest charm combined with a

MYRNA, THE GOVERNOR'S WIFE
HOW CAN I GO TO THE BALL TONIGHT IN THESE RAGS?! I HAVEN'T A THING TO WEAR!
YOU OWN HALF OF BENGAL! I NEED MORE ALLOWANCE! YOU EXPECT ME TO STRUGGLE ALONG ON WHAT YOU GIVE ME?
I'M SORRY!
WILSON McCOY 9-18
I'M BORED, LIVING IN THIS PALACE! BORED-BORED WITH EVERYTHING!
YES DEAR!

Fig. 5.2 Myrna complaining to her subordinated Governor husband (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

duty to the home. From the outset, it is clear to the reader that the Governor's wife is a shallow individual with time and money and few serious cares, tyrannizing her devoted husband with a constant streams of complaints. Although the scenario gives the impression of Myrna as the dominant party in the marriage, the purpose of this plot buildup is to infantilize her by illustrating the similarity between her behavior and that of a child. Falk even goes as far as to mute Myrna by filling her speech balloon with a "blah, blah, blah" to indicate the repetitiveness and insignificance of her moaning; a misogynic gesture aiming to undermine the value of a woman's utterances while maintaining the false binary male ("adult," dominant) and non-male ("child," subordinate) (Norton 1999). Put differently, women are, socioculturally speaking, children which simultaneously means that their opinions and behaviors are by definition disqualified from adult and mature attention.

Despite the grief and unhappiness caused by his wife and child, the Governor is deeply saddened by the news that his family has been abducted. His loyalty to the office is seemingly as profound as his devotion to his family as he goes through emotional turmoil, desperately trying to come to grips with an impossible situation where he sacrifices either his political honesty by giving in to the kidnappers' demands to sign a "crooked bill" or his family by refusing to sign. In the end, the Governor, displaying the same kind of masculine undivided loyalty to his office as the Phantom to his mission, tries to buy more time by stalling his decision and demanding proof that his wife and child are unarmed. In the meantime, the news reaches the Phantom who promises the Governor that he will find his family and bring them home safely. As the Phantom

uses the eyes and ears of the inhabitants of the jungle, communicated to him through the Jungle Drums, to locate the kidnappers' whereabouts, the subsequent panels reveal that even rugged gangsters have a limit to how much complaining they can put up with from their hostages. All the kidnappers get to experience firsthand what the Governor has to endure on a daily basis as Myrna and her son refused to let being held in custody prevent them from complaining about the quality of the food ("I told you I like it rare!") or insulting the guards ("You shut up sourpuss!"). Even the hard-nosed gangsters admit that these two prisoners are extraordinary ("They're both hellions! Spoiled silly!") and express sentiments of compassion for the Governor while almost regretting having carried through with the kidnapping ("I'll bet the Governor's glad to be rid of'em! They're too much for us!").

The Phantom, after having helped Myrna and her son escape, is next in line to be confronted with their intolerable behavior. Fed up with their endless moaning about trying to stay out of sight from the kidnappers, the Phantom has finally had enough and gives Bobbie the treatment he usually reserves for defiant women: a proper spanking ("Of all the spoiled little…! Your father'll thank me for this"). In combination with seeing the Phantom fighting the "hoodlums" (as they are called in the comic) who had them kidnapped and having to accompany the masked hero on a hunting trip for food, this violent disciplinary act marks a radical change in Bobbie's behavior. From now on, he is a completely different person: positive, joyful and filled with admiration for the Phantom. This is much to the disbelief of his mother ("Why he positively adores that brute – and after he spanked him too! I don't understand"), while the caption centers on her inability to properly read the situation: "Mom doesn't know hero worship when she sees it!" Returning from a successful hunting trip with a "fat young rabbit," the Phantom instructs Myrna that "We'll rest now while you cook for us," which is further reinforced by Bobbie ("Men can't cook. We hunted the rabbit. Now it's up to you."), who draws a sharp boundary between the realms of men and women as his mother protests ("But I've never cooked in my life!"). After some initial difficulties, Myrna accomplishes her task which fills her with immense confidence ("I cooked it all by myself! The first time in my life!"). The Phantom adds positive reinforcement by complementing her cooking skills ("A fine meal, ma'am.") and declares how proud her husband would be. Upon hearing this, Myrna breaks down in tears, delivering a statement of soul searching: "I've never done anything for anyone before. I'm realizing what a

selfish woman I've been!" She mirrors her own behavior against that of her understanding husband ("Always so kind and patient") and lovingly embraces her son while pledging a joint promise of remorse ("We'll try to make it up to him, won't we darling?") (Fig. 5.3).

According to the Phantom, the transformation in behavior of mother and son is directly linked to the environment ("It's wonderful what a few days in the jungle will do."), hinting at a cliché of the jungle as a therapeutic space for white Western visitors (Aman 2015). The Phantom offers the same explanation to the equally puzzled and relieved Governor when delivering the unharmed and much changed Myrna and Bobbie to his doorstep. In an act of reconciliation and in testimony of a husband's love for his wife, the Governor generously gives into all her previous demands ("Myrna, I'll never fuss about your allowance again. Buy all the dresses you want."), while also reminding the reader who is the family's breadwinner, but is left completely stunned by her response: "Nonsense dear. I've got enough clothes already to last a lifetime. Sit down. I'll get your pipe." When Myrna thereafter informs him that she has given the chef the night off so that she can cook supper instead, the Governor finds himself in a state of shock. Myrna explains where she acquired her new-found skills ("I learned how – in the jungle"), while adding that cooking was not the only thing she discovered in the jungle: "I also learned what a stupid, selfish woman I've been. That masked man was a good teacher."

The message that Falk seeks to get across to the reader is so excessively signaled that, to borrow from Susan Suleiman (1993, 55), it forms a "redundant discourse." In this overwhelmingly patriarchal framework, the comic ties a woman's true identity to nurturers of others, calling for her own voluntary retreat to the metaphorical and literal domain of the kitchen. According to Laura Patterson (2003), the kitchen, in fiction,

A FINE MEAL, MA'M. THOSE BERRIES YOU PICKED FOR DESSERT WERE DELICIOUS
YES, WEREN'T THEY?
GEE, MOM, WHAT'S THE MATTER? WHY ARE YOU CRYING?
IT'S NOTHING, DARLING. I'M ALL RIGHT.
WILSON MCCOY 11-15
I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING FOR ANYONE BEFORE. I'M REALIZING WHAT A SELFISH WOMAN I'VE BEEN. YOUR FATHER'S ALWAYS SO KIND AND PATIENT...
WE'LL TRY TO MAKE IT UP TO HIM, WON'T WE, DARLING?
IT'S WONDERFUL WHAT A FEW DAYS IN THE JUNGLE WILL DO.

Fig. 5.3 Myrna in tears lamenting her treatment of her devoted husband (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

serves as a shorthand logic for a centralized node of domesticity. And according to the Phantom, the only thing needed to spark this impulse in a woman is "[r]oughing in the jungle" which "makes a person appreciate home." And instead of "home," the Phantom could equally have said "attending to the needs of her nuclear family" (Fig. 5.4)

What is interesting here is that Falk, like the overwhelming majority of writers and artists that have produced manuscripts on the adventures of the Phantom, is male.[4] In other words, the reader is to a large extent supplied with a male perspective on himself and, incidentally, the male writer's perception of women. This particular story is Falk's love letter to the housewife ideal and must be understood in its historical context as a mirror, to paraphrase William Savage's (1990) analysis of comic books in America during the postwar period, of a sexist society at a time when sexism passed to a greater extent as part of the normal state of affairs. In her 1972 essay on the ubiquitous representations of women in contemporary fiction, Joanna Russ (1972, 3) asserts that the reader does not encounter women but rather images of women: "modest maidens, wicked temptresses, pretty school-marms, beautiful bitches, faithful wives, and so on" who all exist only in relation to the male protagonist. Also applicable to the episode at hand is Russ' (1972, 3) consideration that these characters are at their best "depictions of the social roles women are supposed to play"; at their worst, "fantasies about what men want, hate, or fear."

In silencing Myrna by adding a mere "blah, blah, blah" to her speech balloons, Falk paradoxically removes any illusion that she is anything other than a projection of hate and fear when it comes to women. This is confirmed by the fact that she and her young offspring are the only characters

I'VE GOT ENOUGH CLOTHES ALREADY TO LAST A LIFETIME. SIT DOWN. I'LL GET YOUR PIPE.
IS THIS MY MYRNA?
I'VE GOTTEN BEHIND IN MY SCHOOL WORK, DADDY. I'LL WORK REAL HARD TO CATCH UP.
IS THIS MY FAMILY? WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM IN THE WOODS?
WILSON MEADY 11-30

Fig. 5.4 Myrna informing her husband that he can sit and relax as she'll bring his pipe and then cook dinner (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

to undergo radical change during the course of the episode, and that her transformation in personality is not enforced but a consequence of personal soul searching. The premise to the plot relies on the specificity of the sexes and thereby a division of labor: The jungle environment becomes an allegory for the bigger world outside the small private sphere of the home. The former is coded for men, while the latter is reserved for women. In exposing Myrna to the raw edges and primitive wilderness of the jungle, she learns to appreciate the benefits of home, and voluntarily subordinates herself to embody the "right" kind of femininity, the one considered to be wanted and desirable—or as she puts it herself: "I also learned what a stupid, selfish woman I've been." Nonetheless, Falk was far from the only one in the comics industry to infuse his scripts with conservative family values. After the end of World War II, as the return of the male workforce relegated women back to the home, comic books—as well as other forms of popular cultural artifacts—reflected the swinging of society's conservative pendulum with regard to gender roles (Murphy 2016).

The New Women's Movement

A few years after Myrna's subjectification into her domestic role, the housewife ideal clashed with a strong counteractive force at the end of the 1950s in many capitalist Western countries: labor force shortage. The prolonged economic boom made women a coveted commodity in the labor market. While the increase in women in the paid workforce awarded them enhanced financial independence, sharing the role of breadwinner in heterosexual couples, this was still not enough to achieve liberation; at least not according to Swedish writer Eva Moberg in her seminal 1961 essay on female emancipation. A woman can never be free, Moberg (1961) argues, as long as gender roles prescribe that a woman alone is mainly responsible for the home and children. It would not be enough for women to simply change themselves; rather, and more importantly, a different role for men is also required (Östberg 2002). Instead, she advocates for a de-masculinization of work life and a de-feminization of life at home. If Moberg's classic text played a part in sparking the gender debate of the 1960s in Sweden, it would soon be followed by others. Barbro Backberger (1966) continued the debate on gender roles by effectively attacking what she considered a dominant masculine norm in society of viewing women as being passive and subordinate by nature. Backberger specifically targets

weeklies and many male writers' images of women, accusing them of sustaining the patriarchal female ideal. She could equally have spoken about the comics industry.

The radicalization of the political climate at the end of the 1960s and the 1970s became especially important for middle-class women, who began to play a significant role in the political debate (Dahlerup 1998; Isaksson 2007). In Sweden, a new women's movement with a socialist slant was formed. They criticized the hierarchical structure of established political parties which meant that women also found themselves subordinated to men in politics. Furthermore, they targeted the political theory of the left for overlooking family, parenting and domestic work in its analysis (Ahlmo-Nilsson 1990). That these movements became an influencing and rapidly growing force in Swedish society in the 1970s is reflected not least by several social reforms achieved at the time, aiming to strengthen women's position in both the labor market and the home: parental insurance, housing subsidies, expansion of day care and so on (Östberg 2008).

To disseminate their messages, feminist groups began to devise their own activities including the use of various artistic forms such as theater and music. Among the most widely known examples is the play *Tjejsnack* (*Girl Talk*), written by Suzanne Osten and Margareta Grape, which contains the famous feminist singalong "Vi måste höja våra röster" (*We must raise our voices*) (Elgán 2001). Moreover, women's art galleries were established, women's newspapers and bulletins were published, women's festivals were arranged and women's cinema emerged as a new and experimental genre (Dahlerup 2001). In addition to these renowned initiatives, the new "women's literature" made a major breakthrough in the publishing world, bringing the message of feminism in different variations to a far larger audience than protest rallies and meetings ever did (Dahlerup 2001).

In spite of the women's movement giving rise to mediated manifestations for their cause (Isaksson 2007), academic commentators have stressed that this did not extend specifically to the comics industry in Sweden until the 1980s, when sporadic feminist themes began to appear (e.g., Nordenstam 2014). This stands in stark contrast to the United States, where underground comics with a feminist orientation emerged in tandem with second-wave feminism in the 1970s (Robbins 1999; Sabin 1993), while also translating to the American mainstream comic book scene—at least according to researchers such as Ramzi Fawaz (2016) and

Michael Lavin (1998), who claim that the major publishers DC and Marvel both attempted to weave the messages of the women's movement into their comics, especially from the mid-seventies when Marvel introduced a gallery of independent and strong heroines that either led their own titles (e.g., Ms. Marvel) or appeared in a previously male-dominated world (e.g., Kitty Pryde of the X-Men). Others have, however, pointed out that while many of the female-focused characters would go on to enjoy extended lives in the growing universes of their publishers, none of them would become top-flight characters at that time (Robbins 1999).

In the case of superhero comics in Sweden, the impact of the women's movement is harder to identify. A possible reason for this—which has already been discussed in relation to *The Phantom* above—is, to paraphrase Mel Gibson (2011), that an overwhelming majority of writers were men with other men and boys as their target audience. While the gender of both the writers and the implied readership was indeed male for the Swedish *The Phantom* comic book, they made conscious efforts to address the gender politics of the series, explicitly inspired by the women's movement.

Diana Against Patriarchy

The fact that Team Fantomen's Swedish scriptwriters pushed the storyline in a more progressive direction at a time when Sweden was starting to brand itself as the world's leading proponent of social justice and gender equality (Hübinette and Lundström 2011) is not to suggest that Falk did not make any changes himself to gradually update gender roles in keeping with the times. These adjustments are most notable in the constant presence in the Phantom's universe of Diana Palmer, his fiancée, and later wife and mother to his children. Introduced in the very first *The Phantom* episode in 1936, "The Singh Brotherhood," as a New York socialite, Diana is portrayed throughout the 1940s and 1950s as an adventurous globetrotter.[5] Her thirst for danger would eventually challenge the patriarchal lineage of the Phantom dynasty as she, inspired by the twin sister of the eighteenth Phantom who, as her brother recovered from his wounds, briefly deputized as the Ghost Who Walks, tries on the suit.[6] With the costume on, Diana encounters a band of bank robbers hiding in the jungle. Despite assisting the Phantom in apprehending their capture, she renounces any intention of repeating the mistake of trying to fill a man's shoes, stating "from now on, I'll just be female" (Patrick 2017).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Falk redefined Diana's professional role. She begins as a nurse attached to the United Nations medical missions to Africa, before resuming the role of human rights officer for the UN in New York. Even more eventful is her personal life. After almost forty years of dating—the two got engaged in 1943—Falk eventually allowed Diana and her masked partner to progress into an adult relationship. They married in 1977, and a year after their wedding the couple had the twins Kit and Heloise. In Sweden, a country still high on the fumes from the previous summer's royal wedding, the marriage issue would go on to sell a record 210,000 copies. A clear sign of Diana's career ambitions is that she initially refuses the Phantom's dynastic obligations of quitting her job and relocating to live with him in the Skull Cave ("But dear, when we're married I needn't quit my job… this is 1977").[7] Her dilemma over whether to continue pursuing her career ambitions in America or giving it all up to settle as a housewife in the Deep Woods is subsequently resolved when she is offered the role of human rights investigator for the UN at its regional office in Bangalla's capital, Mawitaan. Diana's transition to Bangalla allows the Phantom and her to build a nuclear family, an oasis of bourgeois balance in the middle of the jungle.

To facilitate Diana's commute between the Deep Woods and her city office, the Phantom builds them a tree house—another of Falk's borrowings from *Tarzan*—located on the outskirts of the jungle, less than 15 minutes' driving distance from Mawitaan.[8] As the Phantom gives his stunned and surprised wife the grand tour of their new home, he walks her through the house: "This is our living room," "this is our bedroom," "this our dining room," and, finally, "this is your kitchen." All the rooms are communal ("our") except the kitchen which is only Diana's ("your"). Although almost 30 years had passed between this story and the one involving Myrna above, for Falk a woman's place is still the kitchen. Sexist writing, albeit with less explicit overtones, continued to plague *The Phantom* in the 1980s.

In a letter to the editor in issue 7/1981 of the Swedish *The Phantom*, the signature "Modesty Blaise" complains about sexism in the comic, referencing the example above, and affirms that "[e]verywhere – even in *The Phantom* one is subjected to gender discrimination!". In response, Editor Granberg explains that the "chauvinistic male pig of a translator" has merely been loyal to the English original but laments that this was not picked up during proofreading by the "chauvinistic male pig of an editor." "Believe us," Granberg writes as the final sentence in the response,

"we're truly sorry about this…" Even if the reply is written in an unnecessarily hectic tone that risks dispelling the seriousness of the letter writer's legitimate complaint, it is certainly true that Team Fantomen's reworking of the Phantom's universe also extended to Diana, offering a direct commentary on the gender politics in the comic—especially in relation to gender discrimination. "I was inspired by all the events around me related to the feminist movement and how women have been marginalized," Magnus Knutsson explains, "and wanted Diana to play a more prominent part." In one of the Swedish bullpen's first episodes, the 1973 "Diana i Djungelpatrullen" (*Diana in the Jungle Patrol*), Team Fantomen, admittedly attempting to push gendered boundaries of constraint, had Diana Palmer challenge the Jungle Patrol's discriminatory men-only recruitment policy—to considerable acclaim.[9]

The story begins at a socialite New York party that Diana attends. A male bourgeois chauvinist, informing his female acquaintance about a business deal he has just closed, sets the tone for what is to follow. In a voice of admiration, she massages his masculine ego ("Oh, how I admire male determination") while he resorts to biological justifications to explain the naturalness of his dominant instincts ("For me it's only natural to make decisions. It's typically male."). A debate breaks out when another woman interrupts his discourse about how males are different from females ("Women have more unaggressive qualities that make them more suitable for…") by interpolating that any form of gendered difference is the result of sociocultural factors ("What kind of garbage are you two talking? This is only a matter of upbringing!"). This phrase echoes Simone de Beauvoir's (1991, 13) often used quotation, having appeared in Swedish translation for the first time that very year, that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." As evidence, the chauvinist claims that men are better than women at all forms of sport and that a woman can never become a proper soldier. Diana, having overheard the conversations, takes on his challenge. A bet is made and Diana heads off to Bangalla in order to seek enrollment in the Jungle Patrol (Fig. 5.5).

However, her application for enrollment is met with confusion rather than joy at the headquarters of the Jungle Patrol ("Diana Palmer, good shooter, swimmer, nurse by education… what? A female!"). Although Colonel Worubu favors a rejection of Diana's application simply because of her gender ("rejection of course"), a lower-ranking officer reminds him that the first paragraph of the Jungle Patrol declares that everyone is eligible to apply to the organization and that they have the stated aim of

JA, MEN DET ÄR BARA NATURLIGT FÖR MEJ ATT FATTA BESLUT! DET ÄR TYPISKT MANLIGT!
JA, SÅ MÅSTE DET VARA ...
KVINNOR HAR MER OAGRESSIVA EGENSKAPER, SOM GÖR DOM MER LÄMPADE FÖR ...
VAD STÅR NI OCH PRATAR FÖR SMÖRJA? DET ÄR JU BARA EN FRÅGA OM UPPFOSTRAN!

Fig. 5.5 A male chauvinist explains that it is only natural for his to make decisions while women have more unaggressive qualities, before a woman interrupts explaining that it's merely a question of upbringing (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

"combatting discrimination on grounds of race, religion, and gender." Upon hearing this, Worubu decides to include Diana as one of the ten recruitees, convinced that she will never be able to pass all the demanding tests to be accepted as a patrolman. However, the Colonel, along with the other officers, is in for a surprise as Diana excels in both the theoretical and physical tests, emerging as the top candidate in the class (Fig. 5.6).

When informed about Diana's performance ("She is undoubtedly one of the very best, sir"), the Colonel realizes that he has no other option than to confer with the Unknown Commander of the Jungle Patrol. Even

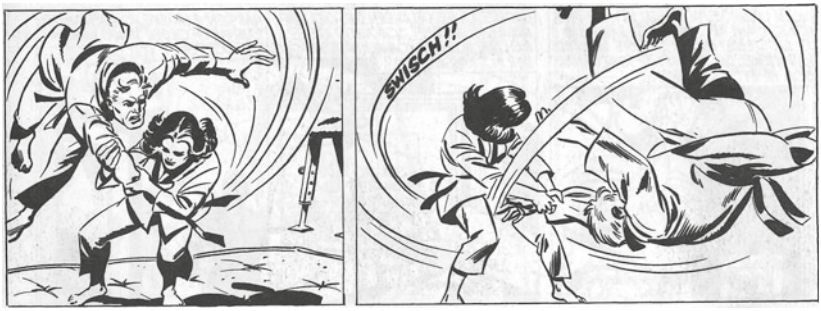

Fig. 5.6 Diana excels in all the tests—especially the physical ones (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

if the reader is perfectly aware of the true identity of the Unknown Commander and his relationship to Diana Palmer, the Phantom is in the dark regarding his fiancée's whereabouts. Nor does he suspect anything when asked if it is possible to recruit a woman. His responses also give away chauvinistic tendencies in the leading character as the Ghost Who Walks tentatively responds in favor of Worubu's question of allowing women to enroll "if he needs a nurse again." If Diana embodies Eva Moberg's advocated message of the need to challenge structures that foster men and women to assume different roles, the Phantom's reaction, like those of Worubu and his men, reminds the reader that such ideas around gendered occupations may exist among all of us—even worshipped heroes.

Furthermore, in a satirical turn of events, Diana is exposed to relationship-testing situations usually reserved for her future husband. Instead of the "pretty young women" (as described by Goulart above) who do their utmost to get the masked man's attention, Diana is courted by an endless stream of attractive men whom she has to fend off ("There's someone else"). As part of this story arc, Diana, as a composite figure, has at least a double function that challenges dominant gender norms: She feminizes other men as their emotions, in her presence, take the upper hand in a way that has historically been reserved for women in *The Phantom* as well as in other adventure comics of the postwar period (e.g., Savage 1990). Men seemingly lose all sense of control and sanity at the mere sight of Diana and are unable to not express their love for her over and over again. At the same time, Diana masculinizes (white) women by constantly excelling in any physical task put before her, reaching the rank of sergeant and beating the men on their home turf. In the process, she also displays integrity and self-control in the face of her countless admirers (Fig. 5.7).

Nonetheless, the fact Diana, in the eyes of other patrolmen, is so irresistibly attractive eventually becomes a workplace problem. Fed up with yet another colleague declaring his love for her ("Oh no, not you too!"), Diana eventually asks for a transfer. She is sent to the Arabic city of Sotubar where Diana is immediately drawn into a mission involving a band of smugglers. Meanwhile, back in the Skull Cave, the Phantom reflects upon the unusual delay in receiving news from Diana ("It's not like her to wait this long between letters!"). The Ghost Who Walks becomes instantly aware of his partner's whereabouts when reading the latest report from the Jungle Patrol, realizing that the woman Colonel Worubu asked about was in fact his fiancée ("Hmm… draft… sergeant

JAG GILLAR DEJ MYCKET! FAKTISKT SÅ MYCKET ATT...
JAG VET VAD DU VILL SÄJA...MEN SÄJ INTE MER, JAG...
JAG FÖRSTÅR! BARA FÖR ATT DU ÄR VANLIG MENIG SÅ VILL DU INTE HA MEJ!
SNÄLLA DU, DU BORDE KÄNNA MEJ BÄTTRE! DET ÄR BARA SÅ ATT JAG HAR EN ANNAN!

Fig. 5.7 Diana having to fend off another of her countless admirers (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

Diana Palmer to Sotubar…"). The news regarding his loved one manages to scare even the Phantom, who instantly sets off to find her ("This means that Diana right now is fighting a whole band of smugglers! I must help her!").

Nevertheless, in line with the subversive aim of the plot, Diana does not need any help, much less to be rescued. Instead, it is the Phantom who, with clear resemblances to heroines in competing comic books who, despite their powers, often had to rely on a male—or even animal—sidekick to bail them out of trouble on a regular basis (e.g., Savage 1990; York and York 2012), falls victim to a surprise attack from the smugglers and Diana who not only saves him but also puts an end to the bandits' operation. Besides playing the part of chivalrous rescuer to perfection, Diana also demonstrates that a woman can carry out a job previously reserved for men just as well—at the same time reversing the roles from the countless adventures in which she needs to be saved by the Phantom.

In the final panels of the story, the bravery of Diana is contrasted against the chauvinist male back in New York who initiated the bet, admitting to his female acquaintance that he was refused admittance to the army ("They claimed that I had a bad back and flatfoot… They didn't want me…"). Diana, by contrast, is awarded with a medal for "Bravery in the Field." What she did not know at the time when she enrolled was that she would be a precursor for other women who would join the Jungle Patrol in later issues[10] (Fig. 5.8).

In part Diana embodies the new female norm advocated by Group 8, the best-known and most influential feminist movement in Sweden at the

Fig. 5.8 With the Phantom unconscious, Diana beats the villains on her own (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

time. Important questions high on their agenda revolved around work, children, family and the capitalist oppression that was seen to be prevalent in society (Schmitz 2007). According to Elisabeth Eglán (2015), the members were both militant and assertive which made them appear as a new form of woman. They introduced a norm that, instead of subordination and sensitivity in relation to men, advocated—like Diana—strong and active women who fought against oppression (Elgán 2015). By challenging the Jungle Patrol's discriminatory recruitment policy, Diana ensures that men and women are measured on the same terms. In the process, she fights both patriarchal oppression and prejudices. This also seems to have resonated with readers. Based on interviews with Swedish *The Phantom* readers, Kevin Patrick (2017) concludes that the crafting of Diana into an independent and assertive personality proved particularly popular among a growing female readership.

At the same time, for an adventure comic book with a predominantly young male readership, the radical message is partly undermined by panels of Diana taking a shower or undressing during the Jungle Patrol's mandatory medical examination, showing off her body from different angles and displaying her bare breasts while flashing a seductive smile toward the embarrassed elderly male physician. For all their intended radicalness, Team Fantomen were unable to avoid the pitfalls of implicating the reader in the consumption of women's bodies from a heterosexual position of male desire.[11] The panels are once again a reminder of what is a continuation of, rather than a break with, a tradition of transforming Diana into a sexualized object appealing to the adolescent male gaze (Fig. 5.9).[12]

NÅGRA VECKOR SENARE... SEDAN ANSÖKNINGARNA GRANSKATS INTERVJUAS ETT FÖRSTA URVAL ...
HUR ANSER NI ATT NI KLARAR AV PSYKISKA PÅFRESTNINGAR?
TJA... JAG KÄNDE MEJ LITE PRESSAD EN GÅNG, NÄR EN TIGER VAR FÄRDIG ATT HUGGA MEJ.
JASÅ... JA, AHUM ... DET KAN JU VARA GARSKA... ÖH... NATURLIGT!

Fig. 5.9 Diana's body on display as part of her medical examination (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

The ambivalent nature of this particular storyline, combining a radical message of female empowerment by allowing Diana to progress into a superheroine with sexualized imagery, is not uncommon in mainstream comics. Albeit with less overt political ambitions, more recent attempts to accredit women with exceptional powers have failed to bypass the same pitfalls. This is perhaps best illustrated by Wonder Woman who, despite several attempts to radically transform the character by focusing on her alter ego Diana Prince—substituting hot pants for actual pants—and killing off love interest Steve Trevor, was still criticized for the way it portrayed women, by both feminist theory advocates and their critics (Gibson 2017).[13] Where Geoff Klock (2002, 111) affirms that female superheroes have traditionally been "simply objects of sexual voyeurism," Richard Reynolds (1992, 81) identifies the central reason for this in the fact that the adolescent male still remains the perceived audience for superhero comics:

> In their simultaneous offering and denying of sexuality, plus their cool strength and determination in battle with supervillains, the superheroines offer a reconciliation of all the conflicting demands of adolescent male sexual desire. Sexuality is domesticated (i.e., made safe) and yet remains exceptionally exciting. Women are visually thrilling, and yet threatening and dangerous only to outsiders and strangers.

What Reynolds refers to as the "domestication" of female sexuality relates to the ways in which the visual elements of the comic depict powerful—super-enhanced or otherwise—women in a sexualized manner, yet their

powers are either condemned or, as is often the case, significantly less powerful than those of the male hero. In other words, awarding Diana powers resembling those of a superheroine, while also transforming her into a sexualized object, relies on the shared assumption that the Phantom remains securely at the top of the pyramid. In short, the reader rests assured that Diana—or any other supporting character—will never assume a more prominent role than the hero. In targeting an implied heterosexual male readership, commercial reasons seemingly play a part in the depiction of female characters.

This ambivalence would continue to characterize episodes produced by Team Fantomen during the following decades. Profitable sales figures, in addition to the departures of Knutsson and later Lundström, called for an enlargement of Team Fantomen. Among the new recruits was the British writer Norman Worker, who, together with French artist Georges Bess, introduced a new villainess in 1979 with the rather unsubtle name of Princess Sin.[14] Loyal to the classic characteristics of a *femme fatale*, Princess Sin is yet another slinky criminal temptress who sought by turns to seduce or destroy the Ghost Who Walks, often by means of undressing before him with panels zooming in on her naked body. With the 1980s around the corner and a gradual decline of the New Left ideology and other political ambitions of the period (e.g., Berntson and Nordin 2017), the possible commercial appeal of sexualized images seems to have outlasted countercultural aspirations, at least those influenced by the women's movement (Fig. 5.10).

Fig. 5.10 Princess Sin in an attempt to seduce the Phantom (© King Features Syndicate Inc.)

Furthermore, and connecting back to previous discussions on whiteness and race as in Chapter 2, intersectional feminist critique of comic book superheroines also highlights the fact that even in instances when a female character—like Diana Palmer or Wonder Woman—was awarded strength, intelligence, athleticism and agency, it did little to challenge the long-standing prejudice that the feminine ideal was white (Curtis and Cardo 2018; Finn 2014). In addition to the ways in which female empowerment in the Phantom's universe is predominately limited to the pale-skinned Diana, the color line is also reinforced by the fact not a single member of the Phantom dynasty has ever had a relationship with a non-white woman. And this is typical of the comic book, in which non-white women are bypassed as love interests while white women invariably incite lust in generations of the Walker dynasty's and villains' hearts alike. Despite having spent over five centuries in the African jungle, every generation of the Phantom ends up marrying a young white woman from either Europe or the United States.[15]

* * *

What becomes apparent is that adventures challenging the gender politics of the Phantom universe are sparse in comparison with the numerous episodes with a clear antiracist, anticapitalistic, or even environmentalist slant in Team Fantomen's body of work. Without speculating further on the reasons for this, such disproportion in core themes in the adventures echoes recent research. Despite the women's movements statement "No class struggle without women's struggle" ("*Ingen klasskamp utan kvinnokamp*"), aimed at the New Left and other socialist-leaning affiliations, academic commentators have emphasized the difficulties and obstacles these movements encountered in seeking to anchor feminism within the leftist movements during the 1970s (Hill 2017; Schmitz 2008). Moreover, those feminists who were active within Sweden's Social Democratic Party or the Left Party,[16] Eva Schmitz (2008) contends, often found that women's struggle was absent from the party agenda and was at times considered a competitor to the class struggle. When the Ghost Who Walks is redefined through the prism of New Left ideology, fighting for social justice against all forms of capitalist, racist and postcolonial oppression, female emancipation plays a marginalized role in his political analysis. The fight for social equality is a task left to the women of Bangalla to win on their own. "Jösses flickor, befrielsen är nära" (*Oh girls, the liberation is*

close), the women sang in the renowned 1974 feminist play of the same name. Their sisters in Bangalla would probably have a difficult time feeling equally optimistic.

Notes

1. The Sky Band (1936–1937) script: Lee Falk; art: Ray Moore.
2. The geographical location of the plot is a reminder that in the early days of *The Phantom*, Bangalla was located close to India rather than in Africa.
3. The Governor's Wife (1953) script: Lee Falk; art: Wilson McCoy.
4. A notable exception is the Swedish-American writer Dai Darrell, who contributed 18 adventures as part of Team Fantomen between 1983 and 1986. She returned to *The Phantom* as a writer in 2019.
5. The Singh Brotherhood (1936) script: Lee Falk; art: Ray Moore.
6. Falk introduced the "Female Phantom" in 1954, which is also the first full-length Phantom chronicle story ever. In this adventure, Diana discovers a female Phantom suit which leads to the Phantom reading aloud from the chronicles that detail an episode involving the 17th Phantom and his twin sister where the latter, to save the life of her brother, puts on the cowl and mask. The Female Phantom (1952) script: Lee Falk; art: Wilson McCoy.
7. Phantom Wedding (1977–1978) script: Lee Falk; art: Sy Barry.
8. The Tree House (1980) script: Lee Falk; art: Sy Barry.
9. *Fantomen* 5/1973, script: Magnus Knutsson; art: Jaime Vallvé.
10. For example, "Patrolman Mary," 26/1985, script: Norman Worker; art: Heiner Bade. In the American continuity, the first women to enroll were not Diana but Hawa Aguda, a local police officer, and Kay Molloy, a waitress, in the 2008 storyline "The Patrolwomen," script: Tony De Paul; art: Paul Ryan.
11. The story's writer, Magnus Knutsson, and editor-in-chief, Ulf Granberg, say that the sexualized images of Diana were not part of the script and accredit them to the hired artist Jaime Vallvé.
12. A similar pattern repeats itself over a decade later. Issue 25/1985 (script: Norman Worker; art: Georges Bess) centers on the 17th Phantom's twin sister, Julie, who occasionally puts on the suit and accomplishes the job as well as her brother. Although tropes include Julie challenging misogynic norms at the time that women should not be allowed to become physicians by becoming a top student in Paris under the auspices of Louis Pasteur, she was also depicted naked while showering in a waterfall before substituting the mask for her civilian clothes.
13. The most famous attempt at a radical character reworking of Wonder Woman, while also related to the ideological landscape and temporal span

of interest to this book, is from the early seventies when Denny O'Neil and Mike Sekowski launched a so-called feminist rebirth of the heroine (Robinson 2004). The project was, however, cut short as sales did not improve and the title remained one of DC's lowest selling (Beard et al. 2014). Furthermore, a 1972 six-issue storyline penned by science fiction writer Samuel Delany involving Wonder Woman defending an abortion clinic from male protesters, dealing with a misogynic college advisor and protecting a female food cooperative under attack from the head of a supermarket chain, was canceled by DC Comics after the first issue (Matsuuchi 2012).

14. Princess Sin appears in three Team Fantomen adventures from 1979: *Fantomen* 6/1979, script: Norman Worker; art: Georges Bess; *Fantomen* 9/1979, script: Norman Worker; art: Georges Bess; *Fantomen* 12/1979, script: Norman Worker; art: Georges Bess. In 2018, she returned in two adventures produced by Australian publisher Frew: *The Phantom* #1813, script: Dale Maccanti; art: Jason Paulos; *The Phantom* #1823, script: Dale Maccanti; art: Jason Paulos.
15. The sole exceptions are Pura, wife of the third Phantom, who was the daughter of a maharaja of India, and Vhatta Khan, married to the ninth Phantom and daughter of the mogul ruler Jhatun Khan.
16. At the time, the party was named the Left Party—the Communists.

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion: When the Phantom Became Swedish

Abstract This concluding part of the book aims to determine how, when and in what ways the Phantom has been furnished with values perceived to reverberate with the local readership in Sweden which likely explains the characters unrivalled popularity in Scandinavia. This final part of the analysis also connects back to the introductory chapter's discussion on the New Left and its impact on politics and culture in order to grasp influences to the Phantom's new political leanings. To close off, the chapter addresses how the 1980s, in a political climate dominated by neoliberal demands for deregulations and privatizations, was the start for a continuous decline in sales for the Phantom. When the winds from the left calmed down even the Phantom's popularity lost its's force.

Keywords The Phantom · New Left · Neoliberalism · Ideology · Sweden

Throughout *The Phantom Comics and the New Left*, the main argument advanced is that the Phantom's popularity in Sweden, cemented during the comic book's peak years of the 1970s, is interconnected with the social and political climate in the country at that time. In the hands of the Swedish-based scriptwriters of Team Fantomen, the comic became an evolving creative site for exploring questions of social inequality, international solidarity and antiracism, having absorbed the radical politics of

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the New Left and various social movements devoted to social justice. In the process, this peripheral American superhero, decried for racist content representing the African continent through a colonial eye, becomes a national concern in another part of the world. Succinctly put, the story of the Phantom in Sweden is equally the story of Sweden in *The Phantom*.

According to Janne Lundström, singled out as the main ideologue of Team Fantomen, weaving a certain idea of Sweden into plots was the plan all along. The intention was never to reinvent the Phantom, Lundström explains in an attempt to play down the character's socialist leanings, in a way that can easily be translated politically on a left to right scale. Instead, the strategy was to transform the Phantom into a "conscious human being with just values that could be embraced by most Swedes."[1] And the method employed to achieve this was to reference topics high on the public agenda at the time. As evidence, Lundström cites topics addressed in many of the storylines that have been discussed in previous chapters of this book, including pollution and environmentalism, gender roles and equality, antiracism and the fight against apartheid.

For Magnus Knutsson, the injection of progressive social themes into *The Phantom* demonstrated that it was possible to produce good adventurous comics without the violence, sexism and racism that, according to the prevailing contemporary view in Swedish society, characterized American comics (Patrick 2017). Even if Lundström retrospectively links the Phantom's updated moral compass more broadly to values shared by the majority of the Swedish population, it needs to be pointed out that several academic commentators contend that the Swedish public debate was heavily geared toward the political left at this time (e.g., Östberg 2008). Or as Thomas Ekman Jørgensen (2008, 330) defines the political climate in Scandinavia during the so-called long 1968: "Being a leftist, or even socialist, was perfectly normal in mainstream society."

Another reason why the Phantom's actions and resolutions to conflicts often mirror Swedish foreign aid propositions and foreign policy declarations of intent is that New Left politics, despite their often stern criticism of social democracy, spilled over into Swedish foreign policy during the 1970s, at the time dominated by the Social Democratic Party. In these storylines, the Phantom reflects values and embodies a dominant political point of view, of how Sweden sees itself and its role in the world—regardless of whether the Ghost Who Walks teaches literacy in rural Africa, sets up a co-operative society or brokers peace in postcolonial conflicts. Consequently, *The Phantom* can position itself as not only one of the most

progressive social commentaries in mainstream comics, but also a foremost Swedish example of the significant ways in which the main characteristics of worldviews put forward by students, feminists, artists and radical left-wing groupings in the late 1960s and early 1970s came to impact the medium.

Not everyone stood on the barricades or took to the streets, however. Nor did they necessarily agree that the Phantom's updated political agenda was, generally speaking, "Swedish" to such an extent that it could not be easily related to a certain ideological viewpoint. Lundström reveals that the Bulls Press syndicate, who had the right to review publisher Semic's *The Phantom* production, complained that the comic book had become "too leftist." These circumstances may, however, have been forgiven due to the success of *The Phantom* among readers. Based on the increasing sales figures—with the introduction of Swedish-produced original stories, *The Phantom* sold, as previously mentioned, an average of 180,000 copies bi-weekly throughout the 1970s—it seems fair to suggest that the radical changes to the Ghost Who Walks' universe resonated with the political worldviews of individual readers whose affinity with the comic book indicates a shared investment in the progressive ideals of antiracism, internationalism and equality. It is equally reasonable to contend that the stories, through their capacity to imaginatively address contemporary political concerns, also played a part in shaping and influencing readers' worldviews. Consequently, furnishing the Phantom with values perceived to reverberate with the local readership in Sweden is a most plausible reason for the character's unrivalled popularity in this part of the world. During this period, the American-created Phantom became essentially Swedish in the eyes of the readers.

Sales figures in combination with the extensive continuity of the Swedish *The Phantom* also stand in stark contrast to other often cited examples of superhero comics attempting to incorporate the message of the New Left and other radical social movements in the post-1968 period. For all the media attention and awards, during O'Neal and Adams' previously mentioned run on the slumping *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* title between 1970 and 1972, recently lauded as "perhaps the most famously socially conscious comic book of all time" (Veitch and Kulcsar 2019, 150), sales never matched acclaim and the series was cancelled after only two years. In fact, despite the praise, revenues fell as sales continued to decline over the course of the run. Although popular around university campuses, the series editor, Julius Schwartz, noted that "[t]he average

reader was not interested in relevancy" and added that "[p]ublicity is not worth two cents if you don't buy the magazine" (Beard et al. 2014, 22). Another title with the same destiny was *Wonder Woman*, which Mike Sekowski sought to radically transform in 1968 inspired by the women's movement. Despite being popular in certain circles who applauded the changes made to the now plainclothes character—removing her superpowers and instead relying on her native ability to battle miscreants—most readers disapproved and *Wonder Woman* was DC's lowest selling superhero comic by 1970 (Robinson 2004).

Such accounts of declining sales figures in the American comics market attempting to grapple with radical politics from civil rights and the New Left to the women's movements add heft to Lundström's claim that Falk could not—or did not dare to—address certain issues in his own storylines as he would have lost readers. Without speculating further on this, comparing the popularity of *The Phantom* in Sweden to that of *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* and *Wonder Woman* in the United States hints at a particular commercial appeal interconnected with the social and political climate in Sweden at that time. It is worth noting that Lee Falk himself seemingly did not mind what Team Fantomen had done collectively with his creation. Magnus Knutsson admits that both he and Janne Lundström were a little nervous when Falk flew to Stockholm in early autumn 1972 to visit the publisher. During a restaurant dinner with Falk, the two newly hired Team Fantomen writers revealed their plans for the masked crusader, especially the invention of Rodia to involve the Ghost Who Walks in the fight against apartheid. According to interviews with both Lundström and Knutsson, Falk was pleased with their initiative, suggesting that he had always envisioned the Phantom as a champion of democracy. Despite Lundström's later criticism of Falk for not daring to have the Phantom take a similar antiracist stance in his own scripts, Knutsson saw Falk's approval of Rodia as a testimony to his liberal leanings on the American political spectrum.

The Tide Turns

The momentum in sales figures would eventually pan out, and the times when *The Phantom* had gone head to head with *Donald Duck* as Sweden's best-selling comic book were now in the distant past. By the eighties, despite remaining immensely popular, the gradual decline in sales had already begun. In a 1982 issue of *Bild & Bubbla*, the quarterly magazine

produced by Swedish Comics Association, a section devoted to the Phantom mentions that the drop in circulation is not unique to *The Phantom* but coincides with a general negative trend in comic books sales in Sweden overall. It is also noteworthy that critical voices target what they denote as a shift in the Swedish-produced adventures from the early years of the Phantom fighting for social change in a democratic and progressive direction to storylines where violence is an ever-increasing trope for the sake of mere entertainment. Nowadays, the Phantom, one article suggests, takes almost sadistic pleasure in kicking someone's teeth in or squeezing out information from some felon under the threat of torture. While it is hinted that one possible reason for the eroding of political commitment is related to the Phantom no longer being necessarily "Swedish," as Team Fantomen has been enlarged to include writers and artists from all over Europe, it is also pointed out that an alert readership and careful editorial office could easily ensure that the storylines are kept within the bounds of what can be expected of the Phantom. In short, readers have grown accustomed to a certain form of morality in the storyline which, the article claims, has vanished with the international recruitment of new blood to the bull pen.

Moreover, writer Göran Ribe advances an even stronger case in the same issue as he declares that the comic has lost its ambition to problematize underpinning social and political complexities that characterized Team Fantomen's earlier production. To illustrate his point, Ribe discusses the 1981 adventure "Fällan" (*The Trap*), in which the Phantom goes up against weapon smuggling rebels from the former British colony of the States Malaya or a member of the Irish Republican Army who are all treated in a clichéd manner as "terrorists," playing only the role of sinister villains.[2] Readers of the Team Fantomen episodes published in the early seventies—or Chapter 4 of this book—will vividly remember that the Ghost Who Walks himself is no stranger to either supplying guns to guerrilla movements in postcolonial contexts or occasionally even joining them in the fight for their cause. Apparently, when the winds from the left had dramatically calmed down at the end of the decade (Berntson and Nordin 2017), even the Phantom's ideological compass had started to point in an uncertain direction. In an increasingly heterogeneous political climate including neoliberal demands for deregulation and privatization, the Phantom continued to wander the streets as an ordinary man, but he, like the political climate at large, did not necessarily do so any longer in tune with the New Left.

Editor-in-chief Ulf Granberg saw the comic book's gradual decline in sales after the golden years of the 1970s as a consequence of increased competition from other mediums and greater demands for superhero stories with a darker tone than can be found in the average the Phantom adventure, referring to Frank Miller's success with Daredevil and the Batman miniseries *The Dark Knight Returns* alongside Alan Moore and David Gibson's *Watchmen*. When Team Fantomen made a strong attempt in the early 1990s to paint the universe of the Ghost Who Walks in darker shades, the initiative, Granberg admits, was not a success among readers who complained that they did not recognize "their" Phantom any longer. Today, the comic's print run is a mere fraction of the numbers from the seventies, down to 22,000 copies with an estimated circulation of 71,000 readers (Gudmundsson 2015). The decline in sales has also had a major impact on the comic itself. It was cut back from 68 to 52 pages in 2014, and the number of pages allocated to new the Phantom adventures was reduced to 22 pages from 32 pages the year after (Patrick 2017). Not coincidentally, it is hard to envision a clearer sign of the times ahead than when Parken Zoo in Eskilstuna decided to close the gates to its Phantom theme park, *Fantomenland*, in 2010 after more than twenty years of existence. In an interview with local daily *Folket*, the park's Vice President Mats Ericson said that "the kids who come to Parken Zoo don't have a relationship with the Phantom beyond his being a figure who lives in Parken Zoo. A nice figure in of itself, but nothing that attracts children to come here."[3] In hopes of turning around the financial constraints that had haunted the park for years, it was announced that what had previously been *Fantomenland* would now be devoted to characters from a popular computer game.

* * *

The Phantom's face is full of dogged rage as his tense muscular body prepares to strike again. Firmly gripping the flagpole that he uses as a weapon, the image reveals how the Phantom's first blow hit his uniformed combatant hard across the face. The rainbow flag waves in the background, resolutely attached to the top of the Phantom's unorthodox hitting bat. This cover to the episode the "The Golden Eagle,"[4] published in spring 2018 in Sweden, once again put the media spotlight on the Phantom. The daily newspaper *Expressen* wrote that "The

Phantom takes a stand for the pride parade." The cover sparked controversy in Sweden and elsewhere. Public opinion ranged widely from those who expressed their support and delight at the fact that the Phantom once again fights—literally—against prejudice and fascism, while others, as reported in a news segment by Sweden's Television (SVT), the Swedish national public broadcaster, reacted in rage. Notably, a prominent member of the right-wing party, the Sweden Democrats, took to Twitter to announce that he would never again pick up an issue of the comic book. In the ensuing media reporting, editor-in-chief Mikael Sol had to justify the publishing decision. "I thought that there was a nice symbolism with the colorful flag, representing tolerance, against the colorless gray-clad villain representing intolerance," Sol told *Expressen*. To another daily, *ETC*, he said that with this particular storyline the comic book sought to capture "The Phantom spirit of our age." Precisely fifty years after the political turmoil and leftist energizing associated with the events of 1968, the Phantom seems to have rediscovered his ideological compass, again defending people on the pages of comic books whose basic human rights are not guaranteed in the real world.

Notes

1. The interview with Janne Lundström was conducted by Thomas Storn as part of the forthcoming third installment of the books on Swedish comic history, *Svensk seriehistoria*. I am grateful to both Janne and Thomas for providing me with the transcripts from the interview.
2. *Fantomen*, 1/1981, script: Donne Avenell; art: Georges Bess.
3. The interview is from Folket, April 22, 2010.
4. *Fantomen*, 1/2018, script: Philip Madden; art: Alex Saviuk.

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